

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Fred
Jackson's

The Dance of Death

With a full orchestra of thrills

10¢ PER
COPY

OCTOBER 28

OF THE YEAR \$4.00

Special Offer

\$6⁹⁵-

Regular Value
\$10.00



All-Wool Heavy Jumbo Sweater Coat

Only

50c
DOWN

Send only 50c with the coupon. This heavy, pure virgin wool jumbo sweater comes on approval. Money back instantly if you ask for it. Don't be too late—order now.

Heavy Pure Wool

This is a splendid big sweater at a bargain price. Every fibre pure wool. Heavy rope stitch. Large fashioned shawl collar. Two large lined pockets. Close knitted wristlets. Ivory buttons to match. Made in big full size in rich fast colors. Nothing so practical for fall and winter wear. Sold by most stores for \$10.00, all spot cash.

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Learn to buy the Elmer Richards way as thousands of well satisfied men are doing. Everything you need in clothing or shoes and you pay in monthly sums so low you will never miss them. Strictly dependable qualities only. See this big sweater bargain on approval. Send coupon now

Write for our
Free Bargain
Catalog
of men's,
women's and
children's
clothing and
shoes. Every-
thing on
small month-
ly payments.

Elmer Richards Co.
Dept. 8277 West 35th Street, Chicago, Ill.

I enclose 50c.
Send Heavy Wool Sweater No. F-12. Size.....Color.....
and if I am not satisfied when I receive the sweater, I can return it and
get my payment back with charges. Otherwise, I will pay the adver-
tised terms, 50c with coupon, \$2.15 monthly. Total price, \$6.95.

Name.....

Address..... State.....

←Send Coupon

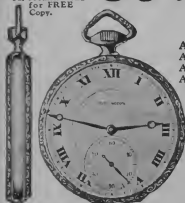
Don't miss this. The supply is limited. You take no risk. We stand back of this sweater. Money back if you say so. Send coupon now with 50c. Don't be too late; send coupon now.

Elmer Richards Co.
Dept. 8277 West 35th Street, Chicago, Ill.

21 Jewel Burlington

Just Out

Latest Designs in Watch Cases beautifully illustrated in our booklet. Send for FREE Copy.



Adjusted to the Second
Adjusted to Temperature
Adjusted to Isochronism
Adjusted to Positions

21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels
25 Year Gold Strata Case

Your Choice of Dials
(Including Montgomery R. R. Dial)
New Ideas in Thin Cases

Only \$1⁰⁰ Down

Only One Dollar Down will buy this masterpiece of watch manufacture. The balance you are allowed to pay in small, easy, monthly payments. The Burlington — a 21-Jewel Watch — is sold to you at a price much lower than

that of other high-grade watches. Besides, you have the selection of the finest thin model designs and latest styles in watch cases. Don't delay! Write for the FREE Watch Book and our SPECIAL OFFER today.

Write While This Special Offer Lasts

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon. Find out about this great special offer which is being made for only a limited time. You will know a great deal more about watch buying when you read this book. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Remember, the Burlington is sent to you for only One Dollar down, balance in small monthly payments. Send the coupon for watch book and our special offer TODAY!

Burlington Watch Company

Dept. 1457, 19th St. and Marshall Blvd., Chicago
Canadian Address: 62 Albert St., Winnipeg, Manitoba

Please send me (without obligations and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your \$1.00 down offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name

Address

Burlington Watch Company

Dept. 1457, 19th Street and Marshall Blvd., Chicago
Canadian Address: 62 Albert Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

ARGOSY-WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVI

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NUMBER 5

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The Old Bowery will live for you again in

CRAFTY ROGUES

BY BOICE DU BOIS

A thriller of the days when top hats were in flower. The first installment will appear next week.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C. LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHERTON, Secretary

CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.

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The Only One In Captivity

A "Natural Born" Salesman



You may laugh at this picture. But it should make you think! In the serious thought behind it is a truth so important to you that it may mean the turning point in your career—sudden brilliant success and more money than you ever dreamed of earning!

If the suggestion of levity in this illustration is unusual enough to make you weigh a vicious and unfounded superstition against plain, every-day fact, it will have accomplished its purpose. For if there is one superstition that has victimized thousands of men—keeping them in miserable, low-pay, routine jobs it is that old saw: "Salesmen are born and not made!" The fact is that *millions can sell, but don't know it!*

He Found the Way!

Take this situation—based on actual facts. A man who has worked all his life in a routine job at low pay, suddenly surprises his friends by moving into a better neighborhood, taking a fine home, buying a car, and blossoming out as a well-to-do and influential citizen. One month he was a mechanic, the next month he was selling goods and making more in a week than he had formerly made in a month. Yet, he once thought salesmen were "born." That vicious superstition cost him thousands of dollars as long as he believed it! If only one man had done this you might call it luck; but thousands have taken this easy way to big incomes, financial independence, travel, congenial work, and steady employment. And it all came to them quickly—after they had found out that Master Salesmen are *made* and not "born."

Thousands Learned the Secret

For example, Charles Beery of Winterset, Iowa, stepped from \$18 a week to a position making him \$1,000 the very first month. J. P. Overstreet, Denison, Texas, was on the Capitol Police Force at a salary of less than \$1,000 a year. He decided to see how much there was to that vicious superstition and very shortly after he earned \$1800 in six weeks as a salesman. F. Wynn, Portland, Oregon, ex-service man, never thought he was cut out for selling, but this Association of Master Salesmen and Sales Managers convinced him he could sell, taught him how, and in one week he earned \$554. George W. Korne, of Oklahoma City, was making \$69 a month on a ranch and then earned \$24 in two weeks as a salesman. Warren Hartle, Chicago, spent ten years in the railway mail service. Then jumped into selling and multiplied his earnings six times the first year. The National Salesmen's Training Association has for fifteen years been taking men and women from all walks of life; in fact from every known occupation and profession, and making them high-grade salesmen. Your own logical deduction will tell you that if salesmen were "born to the task," then the Association—the greatest institution of its kind in the world—would never have survived its first year. Instead, it can proudly point to thousands of

amazing successes and its MONEY BACK GUARANTEE BOND is an open challenge to those who labor under this old delusion.

An Amazing Revelation

Assuming for a moment that you are ambitious, but still believe that a man has to be ordained by nature before he can successfully sell goods; will you let us send you the most astounding proof to the contrary ever collected—proof that you or any man of average intelligence and ambition can quickly and easily be made into a big producer in the selling field. All the facts you can ever ask for—facts that will clearly point the way for you to step into the \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year class are contained in the amazing new book, "Modern Salesmanship." Its contents will prove a revelation to you.

Now Free to You!

Thousands have wondered why N. S. T. A. Members invariably make good in a big way right from the start, even though they have had no former selling experience. This remarkable book explains just why success comes rapidly and surely to those who enroll for this amazing System of Salesmanship Training. It will show you how you can easily become a Master Salesman—a big money-maker. It will tell you about the National Salesmen's Training Association System of Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service—about the National Demonstration Method that gives you actual experience while studying—and all about the amazing opportunities that await you in the selling field. There is a limited number to be distributed FREE! If your request is mailed at once you will receive one without cost or obligation. But immediate action is essential. Tear off the coupon, fill in carefully and mail it now. It may mean success for you—suddenly.

National Salesmen's Training Association

Dept. 2-R

CHICAGO, ILL.

National Salesmen's Training Association Dept. 2-R, Chicago, Ill.

Please mail me Free Proof that I can become a Master Salesman and qualify for a good sales position. Also send your illustrated book "Modern Salesmanship" and particulars of membership in your association and its Free Employment Service. This is all free of cost or obligation.

Name

Address

City..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity; or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Mansey Magazines

	LINE RATE	Combo.
Monthly Magazine	\$1.50	nothing over rate
Quarterly Magazine	\$4.00	\$4.00
Weekly	\$5.00	less 5 per cent
Minimum space four lines.		each discount

December 2nd Agency-Editorial Rates Class No. 4th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED: TAILORING SALESMEN—MAKE BIG MONEY from the very start—opportunity of your lifetime to get into your own business. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics, and guarantee absolute satisfaction. Perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sale. Write for line and all accessories to be sent free. Earn from \$75.00 to \$200.00 per week. State whether or not you have experience in taking orders for men's made-to-measure clothes. A. L. ARNOLD, Sales Manager, Lock Box 493, Chicago, Ill.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

"\$10 A DAY AND MORE," our new book, shows clearly how you may gain sure success and large profits selling Guaranteed Hosiery and Underwear factory to family. It is Free. Write today. C. & D. CO., 15-E Grand Rapids, Mich.

AGENTS: Suits tailored to order \$17.25 and up. \$4.25 to \$11.20 profit on each. No experience needed. Write for free sample outfit and instructions. AMERICAN WOOLEN MILLS CO., Dept. 1762, Chicago, Ill.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN—Make sparkling glass name plates, numbers, checkboards, medallions, signs; big illustrated book FREE. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, Ohio.

PORTRAIT AGENTS—\$50.00 1 made canvassing. Free circular explains. 24 hour service. Prints, Portraits, Frames, Samples free. FRIEDMAN'S UNITED ART STUDIOS, Dept. A, 673 W. Madison, Chicago.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE SROOM. Consists of five pieces, has ten different uses. It sprays, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does the other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. 60, Fairfield, Iowa.

\$195 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous value in made-to-measure tailoring. Agents Wanted. Earn \$30 to \$35 Extra Every Week taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples today. THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. K-104, Chicago.

AGENTS—New Reversible Raincoat—Not sold in stores. Two coats in one. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. You take orders. We pay you daily. No experience necessary. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 706 E. St., Dayton, Ohio.

Men and Women Make Big Money from start selling exclusively Dr. Blair's famous toilet preparations for every member of the family. Complete line. Business permanent. Remarkable selling outfit. Write quick. A. A. Blair Laboratories, Lynchburg, Va.

Big Money, Quick Sales, Fine Profits and steady demand selling Clous-Knit guaranteed hosiery direct from mill to wearers. All styles for men, women, children. Many making \$3000 year. George Clous Co., Desk 42, Philadelphia.

AGENTS—Make big money the year 'round selling latest New York fashions, so smart looking and low priced no woman can resist buying. STRUMP & CO., Dept. 3, 29 West 34th Street, New York City.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Bo-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE \$10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash water for every water faucet. Tons on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

AGENTS, \$60 TO \$200 A WEEK. Free Samples, Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Anyone can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 451H N. Clark St., Chicago.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

Land Seekers! Attention! \$10 to \$50 starts you on 20, 40 or 80 acres near bustling city in lower Mich. Dist. Long time. Write today for FREE booklet giving full information. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245 First National Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES: \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 385 Wainwright St., Louis, Mo.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WE WANT MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE DESIROUS OF MAKING \$25.00 TO \$200.00 PER WEEK CLEAR PROFIT from the start in a permanent business of their own. MITCHELL'S MANGIT MARYEL WASHING COMPOUND washes clothes spotlessly clean in ten to fifteen minutes. One hundred other uses in every home. Nothing else like it. Nature's mightiest cleanser. Contains no lye, lime, acid or orders—50% profit. Exclusive territory. We guarantee great results. Free samples make sales easy. Enormous profit of every package. Two other "side" selling lines and sure no capital or experience required. Baker, Ohio made soap. Write today. You can do as well. Send for FREE SAMPLE and proof. L. MITCHELL & CO., Dept. 104, 1302-1314 E. 61st, Chicago, Ill.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Luccason Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

\$11.00 A DAY FOR 5 HOURS WORK. NEW METHOD—No capital required. No deliveries. No display. No canvassing and bank big profits. DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 12-P, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: We pay \$72 a week taking orders for Reversible Raincoats. Something brand new. Earliest seller ever introduced. No capital required. You take the orders; we deliver and collect and pay your commission on same day. Save customer over \$20. Write quick. Thomas Mfg. Co., Class 1707, Dayton, Ohio.

TAILORING AGENTS. OUR VIRGIN WOOL TAILORED TO ORDER SUITS AND OVERCOATS SELL FAST AT \$29.50. All fabrics, all styles the same price. Over 500 men now making \$50 to \$150 a week. You get paid in advance quick service. Protected territory. 650 switch outfits free. Write Salesmanager, J. B. SIMPSON, Dept. 394, 831-842 West Adams, Chicago.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearers. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 603 Broadway, New York.

27.00 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE: new, different, cannot injure records; \$10.00 daily cash. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Dept. 1012, McHugh Bldg., Chicago.

WE START YOU IN business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$20.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Special Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Bilyer Hagdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

TAILORING AGENTS WANTED—Make \$15.00 a week up, selling our fine made-to-measure, all-wool suits at \$29.50 retail, direct to wearers. Biggest values ever offered—positively sell on sight. Biggest profits than any other house, and in advance. We attend to delivery and collections. Write at once giving full particulars as to your past experience. Finest line of large all-wool switch samples—everything to work with—will be sent with the least possible delay. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., Dept. 107, 161 W. Harrison St., Chicago.

\$100.00.000 Concave wants agents to take orders for Gabardine Gas Mask Raincoats. Biggest selling out in America today. Wonderful value. Big profit in advance. Two sales means big days wages. Only sample of cloth necessary—furnished free. We deliver and collect. Write today for exclusive territory and selling outfit. Dept. 500, Lewis Raincoat Co., Cleveland.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Sign Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. ACME LETTER CO., 2840 F Congress, Chicago.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

BE YOUR OWN BOSS! For full particulars mail self addressed and stamped envelope to THE TAIHOMA CHEMICAL CO., 697 S. 10th Street, Dept. 3, Tacoma, Wash.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas: the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

No Need to Be Gray!

Amazing Discovery Now Quickly Restores the Original, Youthful Color—Thousands Have Already Proved It, on Trial.

NOT a gray hair left—not one little tell-tale streak to make you seem old! Just let this remarkable new discovery do the work—and see how the full, youthful, original color is restored to your hair.

No, you won't be dyeing your hair in the ordinary sense of the word. You see, this new discovery is not an ordinary dye at all. It's just a pure, clear liquid, almost colorless. It's easy to use, quick to show results, a *proved, tested* method of scientifically restoring the original color to hair that has turned, or is turning gray.

Tru-Tone, the new discovery, cannot possibly discolor your hair or give to it any color you do not want it to have. It can restore only one color—and that is the true, original color you want it to have. Each individual strand of blanched, or grayed hair is *re-pigmentized*—which means that it is re-colored, given back its original, youthful shade.

Highly Beneficial to Hair and Scalp

Men and women everywhere write to tell us of the marvels Tru-Tone has accomplished.

Mrs. I. Cantor, 7802 Cedar Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, says: "I have used your Tru-Tone on my hair and have given it a fair test. I am very glad to state that the results I got were astonishing. It did all you claimed for it and more. Its most gratifying effect was to restore the natural color which my hair was beginning to lose. I recommend your product very highly and I will be glad to verify this statement to anyone who inquires."

Mrs. O. L. Heldrith, Dilworth, Okla., writes: "You may add my name to your list of Tru-Tone users, and you can say that I am greatly pleased with the results. You may refer other folks to me at any time."

Not only does this amazing colorless liquid restore the original color to the hair, but it actually helps to rid the scalp of dandruff, it strengthens and beautifies the hair, it removes any tendency towards itchiness, falling hair, brittle hair.

After using Tru-Tone, you will find that your hair is becoming softer, fluffier, finer. You will enjoy using this wonderful liquid that makes the scalp so clean and healthy—that restores the true, original color without any fuss, muss or bother. You can use as much of it as you please.

Men and Women of All Ages Use Tru-Tone

It makes no difference how gray your hair is, or how long it has been gray. Tru-Tone will restore it to its original color. This marvelous discovery acts equally well on all qualities of hair, and on all grades of grayness—from the young person who is just beginning to discover a streak of gray here and there, to the little-bit older person whose hair is becoming entirely gray. It simply banishes the gray, brings back the natural color and makes the hair soft, fine and fluffy.



Our \$10,000 Bank Guarantee

We want you to try Tru-Tone—to see for yourself what an amazing discovery it is. For your protection, we have guaranteed Tru-Tone to the sum of \$10,000 which is being held by the Producers' and Consumers' Bank of Philadelphia. This Bank is authorized and guarantees to refund to any purchaser of Tru-Tone the full purchase price if results are not absolutely satisfactory.

Send No Money!

Further to convince you of the amazing power of this new, colorless liquid in restoring the original color to the hair, we are offering to send you a regular, full-size bottle without money in advance. All you need to do is fill in the coupon below and mail it to us at once. We will see that your bottle reaches you promptly and that it is sent to you freshly compounded, direct from the laboratories.

Remember—you need not send any money with the coupon. When your bottle of Tru-Tone

ONLY \$1.45
arrives, you may give the postman only \$1.45 (plus a few cents postage) in full payment for the regular \$3.00 bottle that we are going to send you.

Here's the coupon—clip and mail it NOW before you forget it.

DOMINO HOUSE
PHILA., PA.

SEND NO MONEY!

**DOMINO HOUSE, Dept. T-4310,
269 So. 9th St., Philadelphia, Pa.**

You may send me a \$3.00 bottle of your Tru-Tone. I will give the postman only \$1.45 (plus postage) in full payment on arrival. Although I am benefiting by this special reduced price offer, I am attaching the guaranteed privilege of returning what is left of Tru-Tone if, after a fair test, I am not delighted with results, and you agree to refund my money. I am to be the sole judge.

Name.....

Address.....

If you wish, you may send money with coupon and save postage.
(Price outside U. S. \$1.60 cash with order)



Health-Vigor SUCCESS By means of Marvelous **VIOLET RAYS** Use it Yourself at Home

This wonderful FREE book describes the marvelous strange new force simply tells how Violet Rays revitalizes every cell and works apparent miracles in overcoming pain and sickness. Pleasant to use in your home.

Physicians and plain home folks explain how Violet Rays has made them well strong and happy 60 pages, illustrated, actual photographs, scientific charts and diagrams. It's FREE

QUICK RESULTS—No Medicine

Violet Rays work quickly, you feel results at once. It's scientific, goes after the cause. That's why results are quick and permanent. Dr. Duncan, Kewanee, Ill., writes "Violet Rays is the finest thing I ever used... to relieve pain, treatments are so pleasant all my patients like it." Use it yourself at home, save Doctor's bills. See list of ailments Violet Rays treats successfully, and many others, not space to list. Success depends on health, this book shows the way.

Beauty Aid Send For FREE BOOK

Brings natural, magnetic beauty of health, no dieting, exercise or drugs.

Earn Cash

Men, women, without experience earn liberal profits in spare time showing Violet Rays to neighbors. Proves results first demonstration, sells on sight. Get attractive offer and wholesale prices now.

Send For FREE BOOK

Explains how Nikola Tesla discovered Violet Rays, how it works, why it heals. Tells what doctors and plain folks accomplish in conquering pain, disease and nervous troubles with Violet Rays.

REVEALS MARVELOUS SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

Shows charts of human body, explains where pains start, how to banish them. Offered FREE for a limited time only, to introduce Violet Rays. Send for FREE copy.

Check Your Ailment Below for Free Advice

Here is a partial list of ailments successfully treated with Violet Ray:

Cataract	Eye Disease	Nervousness	Sore Throat
Chills	Feline Hair	Neuralgia	Erysipelas
Cold	Hay Fever	Nephritis	Tonsillitis
Constipation	Headache	Paralysis	Whooping
Deafness	Gout	Piles	Cough
Earsches	Insomnia	Rheumatism	Asthma
Eczema	Lumbago	Skin Diseases	

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO., 326 WEST MADISON ST. Dpt. 912, CHICAGO

Please send me without cost or obligation your free book describing your VI-REX Violet Ray outfit, and details of your free trial offer.

Name

Address

City State

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel, make secret investigations, reports, salaries, expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn Big Money. Great demand everywhere. Excellent opportunities for travel. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1508 Broadway, New York.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you with. Wilson Methods, Ltd., Dept. G, 84 East Richmond, Toronto.

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn \$100 weekly, easy work, experience unnecessary, opportunities everywhere; open to all. Write today for free particulars. Write Captain Wagner, 180 East 79th Street, New York City.

MAKE EXTRA MONEY AT HOME. \$2 TO \$5 IN YOUR SPARE TIME. PAINTING PARCHMENT SHADES. No artistic, canvassing. We teach you and supply you with work. Distance no object. Dept. G, United Shade Co., Sturgeon Bldg., Toronto, Canada.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and Short Stories for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. **FRESH REPORTING** SYNDICATE, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! \$10 to \$50 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-36. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS. wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan of payment after securing position. CSS, 1710 Market Street, Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WOMEN WANTED. Learn Dress Designing. \$35 week. Sewing experience unnecessary. Sample lessons free. **FRANKLIN INSTITUTE**, Dept. K 522, Rochester, N. Y.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F. Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

SONG POEMS WANTED

SONG WRITERS send me one of your poems today so my subject, I will compose the music. **FRANK RADNER**, 6048 Prairie Ave., Dept. 651, Chicago.

SONG WRITERS—If you have song poems or melodies write me immediately. I have absolutely the very best newspaper to offer you. Act now and be continued. **RAY HIBBELER**, D-147, 4400 Dickert Ave., Chicago.

STAMPS

French Colonies Free—Nice set Used and Unused French Colonies, Pictures of Wild Animals, Native Chiefs, Scenery, etc. Big Price List of 1000 genuine stamp bargains and Empire Stamp Bulletin, all for 2c. Empire Stamp Co., 343 Lippincott St., Toronto, Canada.

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

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NUMBER 5



The Dance of Death

By FRED JACKSON

Author of "The First Law," "The Third Act," "The Diamond Necklace," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF WOMEN."

ACROSS the centerpiece of winter roses—delicately fashioned, fragrant, in their setting of soft fern and glittering crystal—Jack Kendall's eyes were fixed upon his sister's face. But it was not her startling beauty that had arrested and now held his attention. He had long ago come to accept her beauty without thought or comment. She had always been beautiful. As a baby, half smothered in lace and fur, she had attracted attention in the park. As a child, playing in the sands at Newport

or Southampton or Palm Beach, she had won admiration, even from the nurses and governesses and mothers of less fortunately favored infants. And from the moment of her emergence from the nursery, men and boys had sung her praises unceasingly; suitors had gathered from all four corners of the earth to bow the knee in breathless submission; famous photographers and portrait painters, newswriters, sculptors had swelled the ranks of her devotees and added to her fame. So it was not her loveliness that absorbed him now, as she leaned forward across the candle-lighted board, exchanging banter with young Howard

Coleman and Garret Carpenter, between whom she was seated. And yet she had never looked lovelier, for she was swathed in chiffon of a strange bluish green shade that made her blue eyes look almost black; and emphasized the sheen of her bobbed yellow head. Her shoulders were bare and gleamed with a pearly luster. And though she seemed somewhat paler than usual, her full, three-cornered baby's mouth was vividly red. Jade earrings hung from her ears, and a cut jade ornament of considerable size hung on a chain about her slender throat.

The two men, bending over her, adored her. And it was something in their attitude that had started a train of disturbing thought in her brother's mind. Young Coleman, of course, was not to be seriously considered. He was not yet out of college. But Garret Carpenter was worthy even of Katherine, or so thought her brother, at least. He and Carpenter had been at Yale together. He wished that Katherine would stop playing about—stop flirting with every new man who took her fancy—stop in her mad career of dances and dinners and luncheons and teas—stop drinking and smoking and rouging her lips.

It was not that she differed at all from any of the other girls in her set in these matters. In New York, in the year nineteen hundred and twenty-two, these things were the things to do. Even the youngest girls smoked and danced and flirted and drank. The great war had not been fought to accomplish the complete emancipation of women—but it had accomplished it! The amazing thing was that the young girls growing up in this atmosphere of freedom and unconventionality had been able to retain their underlying sweetness and womanliness. And Jack Kendall knew that—for the most part—they had. He knew that his sister—wild, and willful and fast as she seemed—was still as morally pure—as clean and fine at heart as his grandmother had been in her day—and his grandmother had been a Schermerhorn—sheltered from her cradle by watchful nurses, governesses, and chaperons. Yet—he disapproved of Katherine's course—particularly in the matter of Guy da Costa.

"They've brought it over from Russia," Katherine was saying, "and it's not that it is so different from our own vaudeville or revues! The same sort of thing has been done here thousands of times—but not with *quite* the same *finesse*! After all, it is not what one *does* it! Matters so much; it is how one *does* it! Don't you think?"

"A dangerous philosophy," said Garry Carpenter.

"But true—*true*!" insisted Katherine, wetting her lips with the tip of her tongue. "In art—in literature—in society, to-day, and in business, too, the thing is—not what have you *done*—but *can you get away with it*?"

"I've heard that before," said old Mr. Coleman, from the head of the table; "but I can't quite believe that it is true!"

"Dear old dad," smiled Muriel Coleman. "He doesn't know what the world is like at all, nowadays. How can he learn, from his old cronies, and at the clubs!"

"Suppose we take him along to the 'King of Clubs' and give him an eyeful?" suggested Howard Coleman, winking at Jack. "They're opening to-night, you know—and the doors are to be closed at midnight—and no one is to be permitted to leave until dawn. It's going to be some party!"

"I hardly think that sort of thing would interest father," said Muriel.

"I'm not so sure it wouldn't," smiled the old man, "if I could keep awake that long. I'd rather like to see how the young amuse themselves nowadays. In my time, we weren't in the habit of frequenting cafés or restaurants—certainly not to dance there! The thing was unknown! We had formal balls at Sherry's—private parties of course—and the young girls went with their mothers or their chaperons—and their maids."

"The world do move," smiled Katherine, powdering her nose, and observing the effect critically in the tiny mirror of a gold vanity case.

The soft-footed maids in black and white, who had been serving, withdrew. The butler, under whose watchful eye all had proceeded without a hitch, now approached Muriel's chair to ask quietly:

"Shall you want the pocket flasks filled, Miss Muriel?"

"Shall we?" asked Muriel, of the others at large.

"Better be on the safe side," advised Katherine. "There'll probably be lots of liquor—but if there isn't—you know how ghastly parties are! And I *do* want to be amused to-night! I feel!"—she stopped, mentally searching for the exact word—"spring-y!" she ended triumphantly. "Languid and restless and high strung and tense and hopeful and—a little mad!"

"You always feel that way, my dear," laughed Muriel, slipping an arm about her as they all rose and moved toward the door.

"At least—you always *act* that way," added her brother.

Katherine shot a swift glance at him, observed his somber look and wrinkled up her face in a mischievous grin.

"Well—I'm *young*—and I'm *alive*!" she said vibrantly.

In the drawing-room the coffee service stood ready. The butler returned with the small silver flasks and left them without comment on the little consul table near the door.

"Cocktails!" cried Katherine gayly, distributing them. "Scotch whisky and gin! I dare say that will do nicely—in an emergency."

She glanced round smilingly, noted her brother still regarding her with troubled eyes, and advanced to him impulsively.

"What is it?" she asked frankly. "Let's get it over and done with! Am I to be scolded? Have I done something particularly dreadful and meriting your disapproval? Tell me—whatever it is—only *don't* go on glaring at me this way!"

The girls had gone up to get their cloaks and powder their noses; Garret Carpenter was keeping the men absorbed in a far corner of the room. Jack seized his opportunity.

"The fact is, Katherine, I am worried about you!" he admitted frankly. "They are linking your name with this Da Costa fellow's all over town!"

"Well?" she asked calmly, retouching her lips with brilliant scarlet rouge.

"Well?" he repeated indignantly. "Does

that please you? To have every one saying that you are sentimentally involved with a common professional dancer—a foreigner—a Greek!"

"He's a Portuguese," she murmured.

"Well, a Portuguese, then!"

"He's very fascinating," said Katherine. "What all the girls call a 'tiger'! You've seen him?"

"Frequently," admitted Jack. "He's a lounge lizard! A dissipated young rake—with women's eyelashes and oilcloth hair! He wears too many rings, has scent on his handkerchief, and uses a cigarette holder that is just half again too long! And his elegance of attire indicates that early in life he must have suffered great poverty somewhere in the slums!"

"Of course, *you wouldn't* understand him—or appreciate him," reflected Katherine, her glance running over her brother's muscular build. "You're a *man's* man! Guy is a *woman's* man! A lover!"

She closed her eyes, dreamily, and drew a long breath. Her brother resisted with difficulty the impulse to seize her white shoulders and shake her.

"So—you don't deny that you have been carrying on a flirtation with this fellow?" he cried grimly.

"Deny it? No, indeed!" responded Katherine, opening wide eyes now! "I'm a fool over Guy! Until you've danced with him—well, you've never danced—that's all. And his voice—when he presses his cheek against yours and tells you how wonderful you are! It's like the low tones of a Hawaiian guitar! There's something tremendous and compelling and electric in his touch, too! American men are all very well, Jack, but they are not *lovers*! And I'm young—I'm alive—I'm beautiful! I want to enjoy my youth while it lasts! I want to live! I want to *feel*!"

He gazed at her with knitted brows, half enraged at her attitude of brazen defiance—half moved to shame by her frankness.

"If you weren't my sister," he said with forced calmness, "I should classify you as—quite a different sort of woman than—you are! For what you evidently mean is that this fellow has a physical appeal for you!"

"Exactly," she agreed, nodding and smiling brightly.

He stared. He had intended to frighten and disgust her. But very evidently he had quite failed.

"You see," she went on frankly, "most girls pretend that they are ethereal beings far above the physical plane! I don't! I'm a human being—as physical as anybody else! And Guy does appeal to that side of me! There are other sides of my nature that do not approve of Guy! But the men who appeal to those sides don't seem to stir me as Guy does. The great thing is to decide what I want *most*—what I *need* most." She had forgotten him, now. She was debating the problem, with straightened brows and vague eyes and lips that drooped wistfully at the corners. With something like terror, he watched her, fascinated. He had never realized before what tremendous depths there were in her—depths of feeling—depths of thought. Suddenly, he recognized the futility of trying to influence her. She was not only a beautiful, willful girl! She was a personality!

"There are three kinds of women," she went on gravely. "If you are a definite type at all, you belong to one of these three kinds. They are the women who are born to be mistresses, the women who are born to be wives and helpmates, and the women who are born to be mothers. The wives and helpmates are the ones who find their greatest happiness in the marriage bonds! The mother women subordinate everything to the business of bearing and rearing offspring. The mistresses—are the women who love and are loved—devotedly—passionately—and often. If I only knew to which class I belong, it would be so easy to—decide—many things!"

He spent his days in Wall Street, his nights at dances, the theaters, the opera. He read chiefly the newspapers. And the things she was saying horrified him. He stood gazing at her in speechless dismay.

"You mean that you—you regard your feelings for this fellow *seriously*?" he gasped at last. "There is some foundation of *truth* in the tales going about—that—that you are planning to *elope* with him?"

She gazed straight back into his eyes, her own dark with wistfulness and honesty and wonder.

"I am attracted to him—tremendously! Whether the attraction will grow stronger—or pass—I don't know. And of course—whatever I do will depend on that! But if he can make me care enough—if he can make me care so much that I will give up everything else for him—without regret—I'll go with him wherever he'll take me—even if I have to pay afterward. It is something to love that way. And you have to pay for everything in this life." She drew a long breath. "But all that is in the future—yet. For the present—I am content just to—drift."

He stood regarding her helplessly, with something like terror in his eyes.

"Where does he come from? Who is he? Who are his people?" he asked slowly.

"I don't know! And what is more, I don't *care*! Those things are—after all—so unessential. Only this much I am sure of: I will not be frightened out of taking what I want from life! I am going to live! I am going to be happy! And I don't give a *damn* what anybody else thinks or *says*!"

As Jack stood motionless, gazing fascinated at his sister's serious, passionate face, the others gathered, all ready for the theater and the night of revelry that was to follow—and old Mr. Coleman was among them.

No one had a premonition of what was about to befall.

CHAPTER II.

THE KING OF CLUBS.

NAT SILVERS had been running cafés in New York from the time that the dance craze began. His first establishment, the Parisian Gardens, had been located on Seventh Avenue, in a section of the Tenderloin that was not considered very choice or smart. There, he had instituted the first cabaret, which had consisted chiefly of cheap song-and-dance acts, the performers passing among the tables and mingling freely—sometimes too freely—with the guests. No fashionable people

had been frequenters of the Parisian Gardens. No celebrities had been seen there. The commonest sort of fast livers had patronized the place and laid the foundation for Nat Silvers's fortune; for the band, brought on from the West, was the first "jazz band" imported from the Barbary Coast of San Francisco. It was a band of negroes, wearing funny hats and playing funny instruments that had a home-made look; but the music had a barbaric rhythm—a swing—a beat—that was new to jaded New York in nineteen hundred and seven. And it "caught on" in the district where new thrills are always welcomed and acclaimed. Racing touts, song writers, vaudeville people, liquor salesmen of the lower class, stenographers and manicurists, traveling men out on a spree, chorus girls and colleg boys who had not much to spend but wanted to spend it royally, all knew Nat Silvers's place. And after midnight, women in picture hats and low cut gowns, women from the various disorderly resorts, arrived unattended and were permitted to sit about and wait. The singers of that day had specialized in suggestive songs.

But Nat Silvers had not been content with the Parisian Gardens. Two years later he opened the "Jardin de Lys," on Broadway, and angled for a better clientele. There he offered a kind of revue! The cabaret craze was in full swing. The show at the Jardin de Lys had roller skaters in it, a sword dancer, a really good soprano, a chorus of agile dancing girls. And there was a French head waiter in charge to give it what Nat called "class."

He still owned and ran the Parisian Gardens, but he ran the Jardin de Lys differently. And when he opened the "College Inn," and then the "Red Mill," he gave each one a slightly better air. In nineteen hundred and twenty he had finally captured the "top-notchers" with his "Domino Rouge," which became the most expensive and the most exclusive after-theater resort in New York. The Fifth Avenue crowd preferred it to Sherry's or the Junior League Dances. The food was excellent. The wine was perfect. The floor was very small, but beautifully designed for dancing, and the orchestra was the best in town.

You had to be well known to "Charlie" or you couldn't get a table at the Domino Rouge.

And now Nat Silvers was opening a new place—the "King of Clubs."

He had taken an old private house and had remodeled it for this new place, because prohibition had made somewhat different arrangements necessary. The Domino Rouge was too accessible. Several times the police and the revenue officers had invaded it.

The King of Clubs had an iron-grille door that locked, and an inner door of solid mahogany and brass. A man in livery presided at each portal and scrutinized the arriving guests before admitting them. And from the supper room, which was on the second floor, there were five exits, all carefully designed and concealed, all leading in different directions, all planned for the safe and convenient dispersal of guests should any unexpected interruption occur. Here the guests could be supplied with the forbidden intoxicants that they demanded and were willing to pay for on an incredible scale. Prohibition had not destroyed Nat Silvers. It was making him a millionaire.

Into the furnishings of the King of Clubs he had sunk a fortune. Rare tapestries and hangings, just the right furniture and fixtures, gave the place an air. And Charlie, who had so successfully presided over the Domino Rouge, was in charge of this new establishment. For the opening announcements had been sent only to the Domino Rouge's most desirable patrons, and as eleven o'clock struck on the opening night, they began to arrive, expectantly, groups of flappers from the avenue and the East Fifties and Sixties and Seventies, attended by their college and Wall Street swains; some of the wealthy demimondaines with their millionaires from Boston and Philadelphia and New York; a very few show girls, swathed in chinchilla and ermine, glittering with diamond chains and square-cut emeralds; celebrities of the motion-picture world eager to see and to be seen; stage stars; the newest, gayest, richest social lights; and a sprinkling of bachelors and dancing men, the poachers who always come unattended and "cut in."

Nat Silvers stood just inside the doorway of the supper room and watched them, his little pig's eyes shining with greed and gloating; but he was apparently an onlooker, for Charlie was in charge—Charlie with the grand manner, who knew each worthwhile customer by name, knew just what degree of respectful deference or friendliness to assume in greeting, knew just which table would be most desired and appreciated. He was inimitable, this Charlie. No doubt about that. But once Nat Silvers departed from his established principle and interfered when Charlie was about to turn away a guest. It was a middle-aged man in an old-fashioned evening suit—a shrewd looking grim old fellow with gray hair that was too long, a diamond on his finger that was too large, and velvet on the collar of his long-tailed coat. He was unknown to Charlie and uninvited, and Charlie was turning him away with polite regret and a few hurried words about “no tables,” when Silvers caught sight of him and advanced with outstretched hand.

“Harry Bartlett!” he exclaimed warmly in greeting.

Bartlett seized the hand and wrung it; Charlie nodded wearily for the boy at the door to lift the crimson rope and admit the gentleman, and signed to his assistant to conduct him to table forty-seven—back among the palms and near the orchestra. He had been reserving the table for a pair of lovers who preferred seclusion, and a spot from which they could see without being seen. He yielded it up to Bartlett, hoping that the old-fashioned fellow would be comparatively inconspicuous there. For Charlie was an artist in his line, and he wanted his opening crowd to be an impressive one.

Accordingly, Bartlett and Silvers followed the assistant captain to the screened table indicated, and there sat down opposite each other, with the interested regard of men who have not met for years.

“It must be fifteen years since I’ve seen you—or longer,” Silvers was saying with a smile. “It was before I left the Coast, I know!”

“Yes,” agreed Bartlett, slowly. “Well, you’ve prospered, I see. Started in the new

game in time. I met Johnny Whalen tonight and he told me about you and the new place you were opening here. That’s how I came to show up! I haven’t done so well, myself. The racing game is done—finished—and I didn’t know when to quit. The reformers have about ruined this country for my kind. Prohibition! Blue laws! Income tax! We used to have a Continental tone. Freedom! Now—we’re like a middle-aged lady going back to pigtails and pinafores! Guess I haven’t kept abreast of the times—that’s it! I haven’t done so well!”

“Nothing put by?” asked Silvers. “You must have cleaned up several fortunes in your day, Harry!”

“Yes—but you know how it goes. Come easy—go easy! I had my share of bad luck, too. And I got trimmed some—here and there. Oh, I’ve got enough to go along with. I’ve given up the idea of getting into the millionaire class. I’m a kind of onlooker, now. It interests me the way things have changed!”

He studied the ash on his cigar with frowning eyes; then glanced up and off across the crowded rooms.

“The crowds don’t even look the same,” he said. “Do you remember Rectors—in the golden days. The old Martins—the Grand Union at Saratoga? Look at those girls, for instance. What are they, anyway? Where do they belong? They don’t look old enough to be out nights—but they’re gotten up to look like hussies—and they act like them, too!”

His glance followed Katherine Kendall, dancing with Garry Carpenter.

“The face of an angel,” he said; “but—look at her!”

She was locked close in her partner’s arms, her cheek against his as they moved in perfect rhythm.

“That’s the Kendall girl,” said Silvers. “Millions! They all come to my places—especially since I’ve got Da Costa.”

“Da Costa?” repeated Bartlett, curiously.

“The dancer. He’s the rage just now. Dances here every night at twelve thirty! I had him at the Domino Rouge before. You haven’t heard of him?”

"No!"

"Well, the women in this town have gone crazy over him. God knows why. He's a good-looking fellow; but no better than a hundred others that anybody could name. Only he's got a way with them—a way of charming them. I don't know what it is! It's not only that he dances like a streak. There are lots of good dancers—But he certainly draws the crowds. I pay him fifteen hundred a week and a percentage."

"That's real money," mused Bartlett.

"Yes; but he's worth it! Wait till you see him!"

Silvers consulted his watch, and rising, beckoned the assistant captain.

"Mr. Bartlett is my guest! Give him anything he wants! The house is his," he said, and nodding at Bartlett, moved off.

Bartlett turned to the dance floor again. The confusion of laughter and talk, the rattle of cutlery, the clink of glassware and dishes—the myriad sounds of the revelers drinking and supping—had died down as though at some signal previously given. The lights were lowered, and a strong white spotlight was focused on the end of the room. There was an excited hush. In the orchestra there was a great roll of drums—then—dramatically, two figures appeared in the illumination. One was a slender, red-haired girl in black, glittering with diamonds—on her throat—in her ears—on her fingers—in her hair; the other was a man in the black and white of formal evening wear.

It was Da Costa!

But Bartlett, peering through the screen of palms, recognized him at a glance as Tony Costello, one-time valet and pick-pocket, ex-jailbird, a man whom he of all men had good cause to remember!

CHAPTER III.

MAGNETIC, SLEEK AND IMMACULATE.

HE sat, transfixed, staring, as Da Costa and the red-haired girl advanced, bowing in recognition of the tumultuous applause.

Then they began to dance.

It was precisely as Silvers had said! There was nothing unusual or miraculous about their dancing. The girl was undeniably pretty and graceful. Da Costa had lost none of his grace or charm. He moved with agility and ease; he smiled, his white teeth flashing against his dark skin; his beautiful dark eyes were fixed on the girl's face, passionately. But he was sleek, immaculate—and he radiated still—as he had always radiated—a terrific physical magnetism—an animal magnetism that played about him like lightning, setting him apart, singling him out, holding the eyes of all beholders.

Bartlett felt it, understood it, as he had felt and understood it years before. And his glance wandered from the dancers to the breathless crowds at the tables. They were like birds, hypnotized by a serpent. The women and girls, especially, gazed upon Da Costa with brilliant eyes, wetting their lips, or biting them; holding their breath—all, perhaps, save Katherine Kenday, who sat as though a little bored and weary, though there was something in her very guarded aloofness that was significant.

The music—barbaric—insidious—elemental in its appeal—with a beating, throbbing undertone that had something savage in it, emphasized the sensuous swaying of the dancers, and affected the audience powerfully. They followed every move and posture, hung upon the hard, brilliant glitter of the woman's diamonds, the gleam of her white body through the enshrouding black gauze; the flaming hair; the sleek, panther-like liveness of the man. The pair held them in a kind of spell. But not Bartlett.

There grew in him, as he watched, a sudden violent hatred of this puppet of his own—this Frankenstein that he had created! For he had freed Tony Costello from a second impending jail sentence, had educated and groomed and clothed him to be a tool of his own in San Francisco eight years before. He had made of him this finished instrument of destruction, and had shared his spoils equally for the three years that he had directed his career.

Then the war had called Costello, and he had marched away never to come back.

For five years Bartlett had believed him dead. He had looked upon him as an investment that had not panned out. Now he realized that Costello had simply wearied of paying dividends—had preferred New York to the Western Coast—had widened his field of operation—and had eliminated his master by the simple expedient of changing his name.

Bartlett was a gambler, and a game sport. He had held no bitterness in his heart for Tony Costello, whom he believed to have died in France. But against this cheat, this welcher, Guy da Costa, his fury grew.

He had picked him up out of the gutter, sensing his insidious charm; had paid for his clothes, his food, his education; had himself engaged dancing masters and procured the boy's first café engagement. For all this, he had taken half of the boy's earnings, of course—and half of all that he made on the side from the foolish women who flocked about him, and their more foolish husbands and fathers and sons. But that had been the arrangement agreed upon between them on the night that Costello was arrested for pocket picking on the Barbary Coast, and Bartlett had gone bail for him and paid counsel for his defense.

He felt now that there was a lot of money coming to him.

Half of all that Guy da Costa had earned in the intervening years, with the means that Bartlett had supplied. But for Bartlett he would still be a petty thief in San Francisco. That was what Bartlett thought, as the dancers swayed, and the audience sat breathless, and the barbaric music throbbed and beat.

He stood up, trembling, the better to appraise his handiwork and judgment. And his face—topping the palms, now, came by chance into the white light cast by the calcium lamps. And as he gazed at Da Costa, suddenly, in turning, Da Costa saw him.

He faltered. He almost stopped. His feet—so clever—so well trained—missed a beat. To see Bartlett's face like that, so grim, so hard, so accusing—was like seeing a ghost. It startled him out of all composure.

"What is it?" panted the red-haired girl

under her breath. She had never known him to miss a step before.

"It's nothing. Go on!" he whispered.

He did not glance toward Bartlett again; but the smile was no longer on his lips—that famous smile that so intrigued the women, and in his dark eyes was an expression of doubt, of uncertainty, almost fear.

The dance ended—amid tumultuous applause. They bowed, retreating. They bowed again and again. The orchestra picked up the encore.

But something intangible had gone out of Da Costa's work. He did not move with his usual abandon, his usual careless lissomeness; and he did not smile. He was uneasy. Although Bartlett was no longer visible among the palms, Da Costa felt the menace of his presence there. He finished the encore and made his way toward the stairway in the rear, the wide stairway that led to the lounge and retiring rooms on the floor above. But before he mounted the steps he sent a waiter to Katherine with a note hastily scribbled on one of his cards. He wrote:

Get away on some pretext and meet me in the lounge upstairs! Important!

Guy.

Then he hurried up the stairs and entered the lounge.

It was a little French drawing-room, beautifully done, and—it was empty. He made sure of that! Then he passed into the little Turkish smoking room beyond it and made sure that that was empty, too. Returning to the little French drawing-room, he waited there, watching the door. Since there was no other way to enter either room save by that door—the Turkish room was just a sort of alcove with no doorway of its own—he felt sure that he could say what he wanted to say to Katherine without any danger of eavesdroppers—and this was most essential.

If he had been permitted to follow the course he had carefully mapped out for himself, he would not have asked Katherine to marry him for another month at the least. He was by no means sure of his hold upon her emotions yet. But the untimely arrival

of Bartlett was forcing his hand; for Bartlett knew too much about him. Bartlett could—if he so desired—reveal to Katherine or her family, enough about his past to destroy what feeling the girl had for him. And she was his great opportunity. Marriage with her meant not only fortune—it meant security, too, and a future. He was playing for big stakes—the biggest stakes he had ever played for—and time pressed.

Just what Bartlett meant to do Da Costa had no idea; but that Bartlett would take some means of avenging the trick that had been played upon him, Da Costa felt certain. He knew Bartlett.

He regretted now that he had not played fair; but it had seemed so simple to eliminate Bartlett by changing his name and so to keep all his earnings for himself. And he had believed Bartlett permanently established in the West. He had so often heard the older man declare that the golden opportunities lay there—that there was nothing in the East for him or his kind. And now—here he was—most inopportunistically—turning up to jeopardize Da Costa's hard-fought campaign.

Pacing the floor nervously, he waited, watching the door, listening for the sound of Katherine's coming.

There was a step on the stair. He mopped his perspiring brow, and forced a smile.

But the smile faded as he saw that it was Bartlett who appeared in the doorway.

He had noted Da Costa's retreat from the supper room and had followed him, unostentatiously. Now he quietly closed the door behind him and advanced, his eyes fixed grimly upon Da Costa's whitening face.

"Hello, Tony," he said pleasantly—too pleasantly. In his voice was the ring of steel.

Da Costa wet his lips. His first impulse was to deny his identity—to pretend to be somebody else. Then, the futility of such a move came home to him. He stood silent.

"You haven't forgotten me, have you?" said Bartlett. "Harry Bartlett—from Frisco. Don't you remember the night I went bail for you when you were up on that larceny charge—and I got my lawyer to

defend you? And that little affair with the Cronin girl at Vernon—"

"Sure, I remember you. Of course I remember you," said Da Costa hurriedly. "But we can't talk here—"

"Yes, we can talk here, all right," said Bartlett interrupting. "And we're going to talk here!"

Da Costa was trembling.

"Impossible!" he protested. "Too many about! This is a public room. Any one may come in—at any moment—"

He was thinking of Katherine—blessing whatever it was or *whoever* it was that was detaining her.

"Come to my rooms—to-morrow?" he urged.

"Oh, no," smiled Bartlett, shaking his head. "You gave me the slip once. I'm taking no chances with you a second time! You little skunk! Thought you'd shake me, did you? Thought you didn't need me any more—so you'd chuck me! You welcher!"

His self-control was slipping now. He was working himself into a passion of rage. And his voice was raised; but the jazz band downstairs was beating out another weird, barbaric dance tune—and nobody heard.

"Shut up, I tell you! We can settle all this later!" cried Da Costa in fear.

"We'll settle it *now*!" roared Bartlett hoarsely. "And we'll settle dollar for dollar! You hear! Why, you'd be in the gutter yet if I hadn't picked you out and cleaned you up and taught you how to *play* this game! You're very fine to-night, Mr. Guy da Costa! Your nails are manicured, and your trousers are nicely creased, and your manners are very high and mighty. But everything you've got, *I got for you—hear that?* I got you those pearl studs! I got you that ring—all of it—everything—it's all *mine*! And you're going to come across—and come clean!"

Da Costa's eyes were glittering, now. His fear of discovery and disgrace—the agonizing possibility that this old man might wreck his plans—ruin his carefully planned campaign for future greatness—and security—set blazing in him suddenly the fires of battle. He was at bay—and true to his type, when he was cornered, he would fight.

"You're going to shut up," he cried through clenched teeth, "or I'm going to have you thrown out of here—into the street!"

Bartlett caught his breath; he saw red.

"You're going to have me thrown out?" he repeated. "You *jailbird!*" he cried.

Da Costa leaped at his throat—reverting to earlier tactics—to the tricks of the street gamin he had been when Bartlett had first picked him up. He had lost all caution, now. His one impulse was to still that taunting voice that threatened to jeopardize his future. There was murder in his heart—murder in the fingers that closed upon the older man's throat; but Bartlett had matched his wits against the law too many times to succumb now without a struggle. In fact, he was—as always—prepared.

On his way up, he had passed a serving table, and his eye had fallen upon a small, sharp, steak knife that lay on it—a little French carving knife—a dangerous weapon. Unarmed, he had recognized the wisdom of preparing against just such an attack as this. He reached for the knife, which he had hidden in his waistcoat pocket.

Sensing the meaning of his move, Da Costa released his grip upon Bartlett's throat and seized the hand that already gripped the weapon. They struggled, Da Costa with the fear of death egging him on; Bartlett obsessed with the fury to punish and avenge.

The knife, drawn from his waistcoat pocket by Bartlett, was forced back by Da Costa, until the sharp point of it pierced the older man's side, and was driven in slowly, painfully. But he was a Spartan and he made no outcry—only exerted every ounce of strength there was in him—and steeling his muscles, forced back Da Costa's hand.

Slowly the knife came out; Bartlett forced it away from himself and toward Da Costa, turning the blade as it came. Dread and horror crept into the dancer's eyes. He felt the intensity of purpose back of the knife, though he did not know of the pain that Bartlett was suffering, or the warm blood that he felt trickling out against his shirt. Closer and closer came the point toward Da Costa's throat.

Now the anger in him was passing, to be replaced by craven fear. The point of the blade scratched against his collar. He grew cold; sweat stood out on his brow; he exerted all his energy to force back the hand that clutched it so firmly—but to no avail. He felt the steel upon his throat—threw back his head and uttered a cry of horror. But a gasp—a gurgle cut short the cry as the blade went home.

The grip upon Bartlett's arm tightened spasmodically and loosed. Guy da Costa lurched forward, a trembling, shaking heap—and lay still, the knife still plunged to the hilt in his neck.

And as Bartlett stood looking down at what he had done, with one hand pressing his own wounded side, the throbbing, beating uncivilized music of the band downstairs—a fitting accompaniment to such a deed—suddenly ended with a weird jarring discord—and Bartlett heard Katherine's knock upon the door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCREAM OF A WOMAN.

THE arrival of Guy da Costa's card at the Colemans' table had aroused Jack Kendall's ire and stirred his antagonism afresh; but the message written on it had appealed strongly to Katherine's thirst for adventure and romance:

Get away on some pretext and meet me in the lounge upstairs! Important!

Guy.

Those words, written in a hurried scrawl, piqued her curiosity—spurred her imagination. With eyes so much keener because of her interest in him, she had observed Da Costa's strange behavior during his dance, and she had wondered. It was clear, now, that something had happened. Was he ill, perhaps?

Her brother's eyes, fixed on her, aroused her from her abstraction. She tucked the card into the front of her gown and looked up to find the others at the table all watching her questioningly.

She smiled and dismissed the waiter with a nod—turned to Garret Carpenter with perfect poise and assurance and cried:

"Come on, Garry! The 'Song of India'! We can't miss this!"

And an instant later she was dancing with him, as though the message on the card had been a jest of some sort—and of no importance at all. But Jack Kendall was not deceived, nor was Garry Carpenter. Both men had seen the almost imperceptible raising of her eyebrows as she had read the message—the fixed stare with which she had regarded it. Both men were alert—and rather anxious.

Meanwhile Katherine danced, with eyes half closed, her cheek against Garry's, her mind racing.

She hoped that he was not ill—that nothing had happened which might precipitate a crisis in their pleasant relationship; for as she had truthfully told her brother, she was not at all sure yet what she wanted to do about Guy. She understood the nature of his appeal to her, perfectly—but she was not sure enough of herself yet to know just how much that sort of appeal meant to her. And young as she was, she was clever enough to realize that her whole future was at stake in the affair—and that she must make no mistake.

He thrilled her—he made love to her divinely, with every glance, with every word, with every accidental contact; for he had the suavity and finesse about such things, the absolute freedom from self-consciousness that most Latins have—and no Americans. He never felt as a silly ass saying flattering things to her. He never minded the whole world's knowing that he adored her. She liked that. But there was much in him that she did not quite like—that she did not quite understand—but that she vaguely distrusted.

For one thing, she did not absolutely believe him. There was something about his eyes—wide and dark and melting as they were—something disturbing. He had not the frankness, the straight-from-the-shoulder honesty, the substantial reliability of Garry Carpenter. He seemed, at times, too tactful, too diplomatic. And he lacked Carpenter's cool head, his reasonableness. He was not remarkably intelligent: but he was charming; he amused her, and stirred her to strange new depths of feeling.

However, it was one thing to dance and flirt and play about with him, and another thing altogether to give her whole future into his keeping.

"The Song of India" went on—not exactly as Rimski-Korsakov wrote it, but as the leader of the jazz band had arranged it for dancing. And Garry Carpenter held her close, trembling at the precious contact, but inarticulate. She knew this—as all girls know—understood perfectly that she could have him for the mere nod of her head, and she smiled up at him, wishing that he could stir in her the depths that Da Costa stirred, for she already admired him—liked him—respected him, more than she could ever admire or like or respect Da Costa.

The dance ended, but most of the dancers held their places, applauding, smiling toward the band, waiting for the encore that was never denied them. This was her opportunity. She had been reluctant to hurry to the lounge upon receipt of Guy's note, partly through an unwillingness to annoy her brother, partly through a disinclination to flatter Guy. But now she laid her hand on Garry's arm and murmured softly:

"I think I'll run up and powder my nose, if you'll come with me as far as the stairs. Something seems to tell me I need to get organized!"

"Right-o!" said Garry.

The dance began again, but they moved through the slowly progressing couples without much difficulty, and gained the stairway. It was beyond the entrance to the supper room, so they were screened from observation here, and as she turned to mount the steps, Garry detained her.

"Oh, Kit," he said, as if he had suddenly thought of something, and she turned, hesitating. "We're good friends, aren't we?" he brought out then, slowly, and with some difficulty.

She stared—arrested by his manner, discerning the seriousness underneath.

"Why—of course," she cried sincerely. "You know that!"

"We've always been," he admitted, "and I hope we'll go on being—no matter what happens—ever—to—to either of us.

But what I particularly wanted to say was—I wish you would promise me that—if ever you have to make an important decision—you know—I mean one that really concerns you deeply—you'll tell me about it first—and talk it over."

He was flushed, now, and embarrassed.

"Why—Garry!" she cried, astonished.

"I know it's a lot to ask—and that I've no right to ask it—even as a friend," he went on; "but I do wish you'd promise. It's just—that I don't want you to—make any mistakes. There are some things about life, perhaps, that you don't know—and maybe I do. And maybe I could help you a little. You're so young—and so much flattered. And it's so easy to make a mess of things!"

She was frowning a little now—not entirely pleased.

"Don't misunderstand me," he begged miserably. "I'm not criticizing you—or trying to intrude myself into your affairs. I don't know how to say it. I'm not much at this sort of thing; but—if I could only safeguard you a little—you are so impulsive—so big-hearted and sympathetic. If I could just be sure that you wouldn't do anything—anything really important—without a lot of careful thinking—"

He stopped, for she had laid her hand on his arm again with the simplicity and naturalness of a child, and she was smiling.

"Dear Garry," she cried softly. "I can promise you that!"

And then she ran lightly upstairs, humming to herself. She passed into the dressing room, powdered her nose, shook out her bobbed hair and patted it into shape with deft fingers; rouged her lips. Then she knocked softly at the door of the lounge, which was closed.

The music had stopped again, downstairs. She waited, knocked again—and still obtaining no answer, tried the knob. The door opened, and she went in.

Garry, meanwhile, waited at the foot of the stairs to escort her back to her table. He lighted a cigarette and lounged against the newel post, idly watching the crowded drawing room through the curtained doorway. For one—two—perhaps three minutes he stood there waiting. Then—he

heard a scream—terrified—startled—anguished—a woman's scream—Katherine's; and he mounted the stairs two at a time. The door to the lounge was now open. He dashed in—looked wildly around—and saw Guy's body on the floor behind the door. The maid from the ladies' dressing room and the boy from the men's room crowded in behind him, drawn by the scream.

Katherine was not there.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOORS ARE LOCKED.

A GLANCE assured Garry that the man on the floor was dead; but his concern was not for him, but for Katherine. Leaving the maid and the cloak-room boy to bend over the body and search for signs of life, he hurried on into the Turkish room beyond.

No one here, either—and yet—no other means of egress. She could not have left the room after he heard the scream without his meeting her on the stairs. She must be here—somewhere. But where?

"Katherine!" he called. "*Katherine!*"

At the sound of his voice the drapery along the wall stirred, and without a sound the girl fell out from behind them in a helpless little heap upon the floor. She had fainted.

Picking her up in his arms, he carried her out into the French drawing-room, where the maid and the boy still lingered in horrible fascination.

"Get her some water—smelling salts—anything to restore her," he cried, placing her in the woman's arms, and turning to the boy, added: "You get Mr. Silvers—quick! And mind you say nothing about this to any one! Not to any one!"

They submitted to his self-constituted authority and obeyed. Garry hurried down to the supper room and summoned Charlie.

"Guy da Costa has been murdered upstairs," he said, turning his face from the crowded room so that there would not even be a chance to read his lips. "I've sent for Mr. Silvers. Don't tell any one else just yet—but keep things going here—and don't let any one leave!"

Amazed, incredulous, shaken with the shock of it, Charlie nodded dumbly—and Garry mounted the stairs again.

But in the interim Bartlett had regained his table!

When the music had stopped, and he had looked up from the dead man at his feet to hear Katherine's knock on the door, he had known one agonizing instant of panic, and had had to clench his fists and set his jaw against the wild impulse to run amuck—to run yelling down into that laughing, dancing, careless throng and shout aloud what he had done.

The madness passed.

Glancing swiftly about the little French drawing-room, he had seen at a glance that there was no hiding place there—the hangings at the windows were short, the furnishings stood out against the white woodwork and pale yellow walls. There was no closet, no other door save into the Turkish smoking room. He retreated through that—and just in time, for Katherine, after knocking a second time, was opening the door.

The Turkish room had no other exit through which he could escape, but the walls were draped to give the room the appearance of a tent. He secreted himself behind the draperies—listening.

From this hiding place he had overheard the rest of the little drama enacted—Katherine's scream—her retreat to the Turkish room—her attempt to conceal herself behind the draperies, too.

He had held his breath, then—had stood there with his hand pressed hard upon the wound in his side, his wide eyes fixed—every nerve alert. Only the girl's collapse had saved him from discovery then, for if Garry had searched, he must surely have found Bartlett first, as Bartlett was nearer to him.

But Katherine had fainted, falling out into view as she gave way, and Bartlett had heard the maid and the boy sent on their errands; had heard Garry, too, run down the stairs.

Seizing his opportunity, he had come out from his hiding place, past the dead man stealthily, down the stairs, and back to his table unobserved.

Triumphantly, now, he relaxed, examining with cautious fingers the knife wound in his side. It pained a good deal, and it bled. He could feel the blood oozing slowly out—could feel it soaking his heavy undergarment and shirt; but it was under his arm and it did not show. Only the waistcoat had ripped under the knife blade, not his coat. If he could get out now without arousing suspicion, he could get away—free. No one would ever know.

The first thing was to establish an alibi. He summoned a waiter.

"Can't I get some service here?" he cried indignantly. "I've been trying to get some attention for twenty minutes."

"Yes, sir," said the waiter. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't see you. What would you like?"

"Some champagne," said Bartlett, carelessly, "and my check!"

"Check?" said the waiter, in some surprise. "But you can't leave *now*, sir. The doors are locked!"

"Locked?" repeated Bartlett. His voice was not quite steady. He tried to muster a look of surprise. "Why are the doors locked? What has happened?"

He felt—as soon as he had said it—that that was not at all the thing to say—but it was too late to withdraw it; he could only smile as though he had been half in jest.

"Nothing has happened, sir," answered the waiter. "It is just Mr. da Costa's idea for the opening night—to make the party last. No one is allowed to go home until daybreak."

"Mr. da Costa's idea?" repeated Bartlett, slowly.

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, and moved away.

Bartlett drew a long breath. *Da Costa's idea!* There was something arresting in that—something alarming—something like fate. Without guessing what was to happen to him that night, Da Costa had planned to have the doors locked upon the guests and not opened until dawn—and now those locked doors stood between his murderer and freedom. Perhaps those locked doors would serve to avenge Da Costa. It was simply a question of time.

Could Bartlett stanch that gentle flow of

blood before the stain spread far enough to be seen and betray him. It was hidden securely now beneath his waistcoat and his coat. But daybreak was hours off.

He looked at his watch. Ten minutes past one! That meant five hours—six hours, perhaps, to wait. Six hours to sit there waiting! Waiting for the news to spread—for the frenzy of excitement to begin—for the coming of the police and the investigation. Six hours—in which that wound in his side might bleed—and the blood stain spread slowly, soaking through the waistcoat and the coat until it appeared ominously dark and wet—for all the world to see—until it crept gradually above the line of his waistcoat, standing out redly in plain view against the soft plaited bosom of his white shirt.

Six hours!

He relaxed in his chair, with a look of weariness on his graying face. Any other man in the world would have been beaten down under the thought of such a hideous strain; but Bartlett was game—and a fighter. He had played against odds all his life—and time and again he had won. And he told himself, now, grimly, he was not going to *begin* to be a quitter—not at his age! Let it be a fight between that dead man upstairs and himself! He had killed Da Costa—and Da Costa had locked the doors. Well, Bartlett would stand pat and let the dead man make the next move in the game. If he must wait quietly there, watching those jazz mad, drink mad young fools capering and laughing, he would wait. He folded his napkin and thrust it underneath his coat, against the wound. He could not get it closer to the flow of blood, even there among the palms where Charlie had hidden him. Somebody might see him opening his waistcoat and shirt. But it might absorb some of the damned blood and so postpone its crimson accusation!

The waiter brought his champagne and filled his glass—and he drank it off and followed it with another. It might sustain him, he thought. Then came the thought that it would quicken his heart action and increase the flow of blood. He began to sip it, then, at intervals, calculating them with care. It gave him something to think

about, beside his game with the dead man upstairs.

The band began to play "The Song of India" again—by request.

Upstairs, in the dressing room, Katherine opened her eyes and stared about her. Gradually recollection came. She called for Garry—wildly—like a frightened child—remembering that he had been calling her name as she fell.

"Garry!" she wailed piteously.

He came as far as the door and she went to meet him. He took her in his arms, simply, and held her close, comforting her. She buried her bobbed yellow head on his shoulder, sobbing a little.

"You saw him? You know?" she said.

"Yes," he said soothingly.

"That dreadful knife! Oh, who could have done it? *Who?*" she asked tearfully. "Such a dreadful thing!"

"I don't know—but we'll find out," he assured her. "He was—dead when you found him?"

"Yes—I think so," she answered. "He *must* have been! The knife was—*deep* in his throat—and—he didn't move when I cried out!"

"And you—saw nobody else there?" asked Garry.

"Nobody!"

"I saw the young lady go in," said the maid from the dressing room. She had been listening, and she spoke up now, proud to have something more to add. "Nobody came out after. Not till you went in. I didn't see nobody else!"

They looked at her—and then Silvers came hurrying up the stairs. Charlie had already told him the news.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"In there," answered Garry.

"Come in!" said Silvers.

Garry hesitated, looking at Katherine.

"Could you—bear it?" he asked gently.

"Yes—yes!" she answered.

They followed him into the little French drawing-room and closed the door. Silvers was bending over the body to assure himself that what he had heard was true. Katherine crossed to the other side of the room, carefully *not* looking.

"Dead," said Silvers, with a tone of finality.

"Yes," said Garry. "He was dead when I found him!"

"You found him?" asked Silvers, curiously.

"Yes! And sent for you!"

"We must notify the police!" said the little man, still staring, fascinated, at the hideous sight. And then he added in a voice with a groan in it, "This will ruin me!"

Garry found a cigarette and lighted it. His glance wandered to Katherine, who was sitting, now, leaning back in a dainty brocade chair, with her eyes closed. He looked at Silvers again.

"Yes," he said, "if you call in the police it will ruin you!"

"If I call in the police," cried Silvers. "I've got to call in the police! What *else* can I do? You can't hush a thing like *this* up! He's got to be *buried*, ain't he? And the murderer's got to be found!"

He squinted at Garry thoughtfully—then glanced at the girl.

"I better not waste any more time," he said.

"Wait!" cried Garry swiftly. "You might save a lot of publicity and scandal if you solve the mystery yourself *before* you call in the police!"

"If I solve it?" repeated Silvers. "I've got a *swell* chance of solving it! I'm no detective!"

"Neither am I," admitted Garry, "but I dare say we've got as much brains as most detectives, and as much ingenuity. Besides, to make it simpler, we know that the murderer is right here in this house. The doors are locked! Nobody could have gotten out! It's just a question of discovering which one of us did it!"

"Which one of *us*?" gasped Silvers.

"Which person in the house!"

"Yes; but how are we *going* to discover that?" asked Silvers.

"It ought not to be so difficult," said Garry slowly. "Whoever did it *knew* Da Costa and had a motive! We know that much to begin with. And it ought to be fairly easy to sort out all the persons present to-night who might possibly be guilty."

Silvers reflected.

"If we *could* pull it and get away with it, it *would* be a lot better for me," he admitted. "But if we don't bring it off—there'll be hell to pay!"

"It's worth the risk," said Garry. "Isn't it?"

He eyed Silvers steadily, and Silvers began to remember Garry's wealth, his position, his importance. Here was a man, he knew, whose influence was worth having. He might need it! On the other hand, there was the chance that Garry might simply be using him for his own purpose. And might leave him in the lurch afterward.

"You're—intending to help find the murderer?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"And—you're not—shielding any one?"

Katherine raised her head and looked at them. Both men were looking at her.

"No," said Garry.

Silvers nodded slowly.

"How did *you* come to find the body?" he asked.

Garry hesitated.

"I screamed," Katherine put in quietly, "and he came up to me!"

"We'd been dancing, you see," explained Garry, "and I was waiting for her at the foot of the steps!"

"But she couldn't have seen him on her way to the dressing room," objected Silvers, noting the position of the body.

"No," said Katherine quietly. "He had sent me this note—to my table. I came up to see what he wanted."

She drew the card from her bosom and handed it to Silvers. He glanced at it with narrowing eyes.

"You see—he anticipated trouble," said Garry, "or at least—he was upset about something! Something had happened!"

Silvers scrutinized the girl's face; his small pig eyes seemed to cut into her.

"You are quite sure he was dead when you reached him?" he asked.

"He seemed to be. He didn't move when I screamed," she responded.

Silvers still searched her face. The blood mounted to Garry's forehead.

"Exactly what do you mean?" he cried.

"Nothing," answered Silvers hastily. "Nothing!"

He approached the body again, and gazed down at it—bent nearer—staring.

"One of my French carving knives!" he exclaimed, recognizing the weapon still thrust into Da Costa's throat. "One of my own knives!"

Garry looked about the room swiftly.

"His assailant came armed for murder, then," he said. "Such a knife would not have been in this room!"

"No," agreed Silvers. "Not even on this floor!"

"It was murder with intent, then," said Garry; "brutal—premeditated—planned! Some one followed him here from the supper room armed to slay him. But who?"

"Yes—who?" repeated Silvers awkwardly, looking down.

"That is what we must find out," declared Garry, "between now and dawn! Six hours for our investigation—six hours for uninterrupted research—while the guilty person is still under this roof. It ought to be easy. We have only to use our brains!"

"Well," said Silvers, drawing a long breath, "I'll be ruined in this town, anyway if this case gets a lot of notoriety. We'll wait until daylight before notifying the police! I'll risk it! How shall we begin?"

CHAPTER VI.

"LET THE DANCE GO ON."

GARRY threw back his head and squared his shoulders. He felt that he had won the first trick in the hazardous game that he was playing for Katherine's safety. For, the instant he had first looked upon Guy da Costa, dead, he had realized how seriously the girl might be involved. To avoid the scandal for her sake! To find the murderer swiftly and so exonerate her before she could even be implicated! That had been his idea! Not for an instant did he suspect her! He loved her—had loved her for years. He trusted her implicitly, and believed in her. Underneath the modern flippancy, the

saucy daring, the heedless recklessness, he knew there was a *real* woman—sweet, shy, innocent. And he was determined that this inner Katherine—this *real* Katherine—should not suffer for the folly of that outer sham—that product of civilization that the world knew.

"The first thing," he said now, with an air of confident authority, "is to send Miss Kendall back to her party. She must dance—and laugh and jest with the others—as though nothing unusual had happened here. We must let *no* one down there guess! It is going to be difficult," he added, with a new tenderness, turning to the girl; "but you are strong enough—and plucky enough—to manage it, I know! Besides ourselves, the maid out there, the check-room boy, and Charlie, nobody here knows—*except the murderer*. The others must not have the slightest suspicion or there would be a panic! And the murderer would find it easier to keep his guilty secret! As it is, now, we can watch for a smile that tries to hide a trembling lip—for eyes that seek to hide the hunted look of fear—for ears that strain for the heavy tread of the police. You can't sit—hour after hour—and *hide* these things! He will be wondering what is going on up here—what we are thinking—what we are *doing*! But he will not dare ask! We must keep him in that state of suspense! In six hours, who knows? We may break his spirit—wear out his endurance. It is worth a trial."

"Yes," admitted Silvers, "you're right!"

"Come," said Garry encouragingly, laying his hand on Katherine's arm. "I'll take you down—and we'll finish the dance, and I'll leave you at the table with the others and disappear. You must tease me. You must pretend I have been commanded by a brazen little flapper in—in pink. And you must behave exactly as you have always behaved—as happy—as care-free."

"I'll try," said Katherine.

"No, that is not enough! You *must* manage it—do you understand?" he cried earnestly—almost sternly. "You must realize that your reputation is in danger—your *life*, in fact! I believe in you—and

I'm going to save you if it's humanly possible. But you must help me by guarding against suspicion. It is imperative!"

"I'll do it," said Katherine, then. "And—I'll never—forget."

Her voice wavered—broke—for the first time in her reckless, careless life. She had never taken anything seriously before. But she knew what was at stake now. They all knew. The police courts—newspaper publicity—a trial—perhaps imprisonment. *The chair!*

Innocent women had been tried before—and condemned! Circumstantial evidence had a way of seeming hideously conclusive—sometimes.

She rouged her lips anew—and touched her cheeks delicately with her pink-tinted puff. She hastily repaired the damage her tears had done. Her heart was very heavy. It had a weight on it that almost prevented its beating. But she smiled—and—even Silvers was moved by her courage—Silvers, who did not believe in her as Garry did—who did not quite trust her.

They went down the stairs together, Katherine's hand trembling on his arm—down into that noisy, smoke-filled room—back to the crash and blare and thump of the jazz band, the rattle of dishes, the noisy chatter and laughter of the revelers. Supper was in full swing. Things that you crack and get paper caps out of had been passed to all—and many of the gayer ones now had their hats on their heads. They had noise-making trinkets, too, to add to the hilarity and din. It was Manhattan at its maddest! Women, painted and perfumed, manicured and coiffed, and draped in clinging stuffs until they were like some rare exotic flowers, drooped across the tables, flirting their feathered fans. Men, very young and vapid, or very old and coarse, bent forward to meet them—exchanging whispered words. And the women laughed too loudly—or rolled veiled and languid eyes. Other couples clung together, swaying, and turning, but scarcely moving their feet on the overcrowded floor. It was too hot in the room—too close.

To Katherine—coming back to it all—it seemed hideous—unbearable—a nightmare place. She shrank against Garry,

2 A

wondering if it had always been like this—if she was seeing it as it really was for the first time. She shuddered and felt ill. In rooms like these she had spent her nights for a year or more—ever since she had finished school.

"Courage!" whispered Garry Carpenter.

She looked up at him, and a sudden warmth of gratitude to him surged into her heart until it ached. She smiled—and they forced their way in among the dancers—fought for place. His arms about her, holding her so close, filled her with a sense of well-being—of comfort. Only he was real. These people—the noise—the music—the dead man upstairs with the knife in his throat—she had imagined them, she must have. Such things could not be—except in some awful dream. And yet she recognized faces grinning at her—and she smiled back. And there was always that icy chill deep down within her somewhere—that nameless fear.

Of Guy da Costa—the *man* Guy da Costa—she thought no more at all. It was as if he had never lived—as if his path had never crossed hers. His appeal for her seemed to have died with him. It had ended as she had looked down with incredulous, horrified eyes to see him lying dead upon the floor. Without thinking it out or reasoning about it, she felt that his passing had left no sense of loss—only a horrid memory of a man with a knife in his throat—his eyes wide open and glassy—his mouth open, too, with a ghastly look.

The music stopped. They started back to their table, and she put all thought of Da Costa and his tragedy out of her mind—smiled gayly as she tried to catch the jest that Garry was telling her.

The others received them back with much noise and loud questioning and various guesses concerning their absence; but they refused to answer; and Katherine, obeying orders, laughingly described the vamping of Garry by a brazen little flapper in pink. This turned the attention on him, as he had meant it to, and gave Katherine time to regain her poise. She sank into a seat between old Mr. Coleman, who was growing sleepy, and young Stanton Wilcox, who was quite drunk. Her knees were trem-

bling, but nobody noticed. And like Bartlett, who sat across the room, waiting behind his screen of palms, she too drank champagne.

Five minutes later, when the band began again, Garry went off, declaring that he was going to find that girl in pink—and Katherine was left behind. Young Wilcox

asked her to dance—and she rose at once, gayly, to all intents and purposes the same old Katherine. Women are really wonderful! But inside—somewhere—she felt very, very changed—older, graver, grown up into a woman, at last. And she knew that she would never be the old Katherine again.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



HAVE A HEART

I THOUGHT I'd be a soldier
And kill a flock of Huns,
And see a foreign country,
And shoot all kinds of guns.

So I gave up a dandy job
And rushed down to enlist,
And said "I want to go to France;
On this I shall insist."

I got a little training,
Policed around the tents,
And helped haul out the garbage,
Thus collecting a few scents.

I had my turn at peeling spuds,
Cut bread and dished up chow,
And often dodged inspection,
I cannot tell you how.

I went down to the warehouse
And wrestled tons of freight,
And countless endless G. M. cots,
And things in box or crate.

The C. O. found that I could add
And write on a machine,
So he put me in the office,
And said to use my bean.

The war got hot and heavy,
And troops went out to fight.
I worked like thunder all day long,
And cursed my luck at night.

At last I wrote a letter home,
"I can't a soldier be,
Take down the little service flag;
I'm in the Q. M. C."

But now the war is over,
I wish there was a chance
That every durned fool wouldn't ask:
"Oh, did you get to France?"

J. Vernon Fox.



The Way of the Mississippi

By **RAYMOND S. SPEARS**

Author of "Waltzing Coyotes," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

TOSKIN BUYS A PRETTY SHANTY BOAT.

A PALE blue shanty boat eddied down Muskrat Bend and drifted against the mud bar just below Mendova. There it was held by the bottom for a day before any one noticed it. Then the Sneak, a semicruiser belonging to the city police department swung down into the eddy, and Tappan, at the wheel, noticed that the shanty boat was neither moored to stakes nor anchored offshore.

When he entered the boat, as he did after hailing it, and not receiving an answer, he found lying on the bunk a dead man. The body was stark and cold, for murder had been done. Some one had shot the victim while he was sound asleep, apparently, through a window opposite the bunk.

Tappan knew the Mississippi as well as any one. He not only had the river police experience, but he had been third mate on a river steamer for years, and previous to that, he had been a rafter and towboat hand, and as a boy and young man he had lived on shanty boats with his father, an old river storeboater and fur buyer. He knew the river signs with any of them.

With his whistle, Tappan summoned Policeman Daker, who patrolled Front Street, from the near side of which Mendova Wharf was paved down to the current, and part of the paving was covered by the advancing mud bar of the point above town. Daker came running across the baked mud, and with Tappan, made as close an examination of the shanty boat premises as possible, in order to learn what they could about the circumstances and also to ascertain the iden-

tity of the victim. Evidently everything had been taken which would help serve this purpose, indicating a robbery motive.

There was nothing in the boat to disclose any secrets. There was no scrap of newspaper, not a bit of pencil writing on walls or in notebook, no photographs of girls or men. But a banjo standing in a corner was interesting. It was a small instrument, yet beautiful in make and tone, as Tappan found when he picked a bar of "Trip Me Down the River," finding the strings almost in perfect tune.

Tappan examined the fingers of the corpse, but there was no least mark on the tips to show that the victim was the banjo player. This fact led Tappan to scrutinize the instrument much more closely—but no name was written on the head, nor scratched on the rim or neck.

The victim of the murder was five feet, eight inches tall, with dark, wavy hair, dark complexion, dark brown eyes, of slender build and with no mark of real labor in his appearance. His clothes were all good, his coat and waistcoat hanging on a hook over the bunk, his trousers lying on a chair, neatly folded to preserve the creases, and a shirt that must have cost at least twelve dollars was lying over the back of the chair.

In the waistcoat pocket was a thin, expensive watch; in the trouser pocket was some small change; two or three manicure tools were in a case, and the whole boat was permeated with a rather strong perfume, like musk in its weight, but floral rather than animal in its composition. Tappan sniffed this perfume over and over again, and added it to his memories.

The dead truck was sent for, and the body removed to the morgue. The evening *Battle-Ax* voiced the general impression that this was one of the unsolvable mysteries that are the peculiar type of the Mississippi from Cairo to the Passes—a river mystery which the Father of Waters would avenge in its own way.

Tappan, being a mere policeman, resigned the case to the city detective force, and finger-print experts photographed the stove lid handle, the pearl pocket knife blade, and a dozen other features that might show something on comparison with the collec-

tion of finger prints in the Bertillon Laboratory. But these revealed only prints of the victim's own fingers and thumbs.

There was in the kitchen, or galley, of the little boat plenty of material for the microscopic and photomicrography amusement and practice of the various department experts. It was noticeable that the man had black tea, as well as a fifty-five cent grade of coffee; he was stocked up with supplies for a long trip down the river, including a sack of flour in a moisture-proof tin can, good quality bacon and ham, a jar of sugar, jug of sorghum, and various things to eat. The detectives told what a lot of things they deduced from the various edibles and the appearance of the boat. Tappan was not quoted at all.

But Tappan knew a good many things which his up-the-bank detective associates had overlooked. The hickory nuts in the bow hold were from the Columbus hickories; the boat was a beautifully built craft, with planed stringers, tongue-and-groove planking, roofing with matched board lining, and five by five inch timber for oar pins and mooring heads. The long sweeps for rowing the boat were beautifully balanced, and the hull, which was twenty-four feet long and seven feet wide, rowed like a skiff.

The shanty boat was such a one as an old shanty boater would be apt to build. It had been carefully constructed, and there was not a drop of water in the hull, and the cabin was almost perfectly dust-tight—it could lie down the lee of a mile-long sand bar and the wind of a norther would hardly blow puffs of dirt through any crack or seam.

For several days the detectives worked up and down the water front and had Tappan take them up the river for miles, trying to find some one who had seen the boat, but the shanty boaters, fishermen, drifters and others up the bends and along the banks all denied any knowledge whatever of the boat. Two or three hundred people went to the morgue and viewed the victim, but not one betrayed any personal interest in the matter.

The autopsy revealed what post mortem operations usually do reveal in such affairs; the bullet had taken a certain course through sundry and divers wonderfully

named parts, organs and cavities, and had lodged under the skin in the back, showing, as the coroner said, that the murderer had evidently stood over his victim and fired straight down into the sleeping man, but because the coroner and doctors said this, Tappan began to wonder if it were true.

The pale blue shanty boat was towed by the Sneak up into Fox River, and moored in the Wild Goose Nest, so called. This was a bend of Fox River, opposite Runway Street, where some willows and brush grew along the bank. Here many shanty boaters of a particular type landed in and pulled out from time to time. Few places were of more evil repute from the Missouri River forks to the Gulf of Mexico than the Wild Goose Nest. Above Ferry Street landing, however, was the Duck's Nest, where perfectly reputable shanty boaters and sporting river trippers landed in.

The police department, having learned all there was to be found out about the shanty boat, which was absolutely nothing, and having photographed, measured and scrutinized it, turned the craft over to the custodian of city property, and about the time the body was turned over to the medical students the boat was offered for sale, since it was a nuisance to take care of it and an expense to have it watched. The ferryman, Jim Purple, consented to be the boat's guardian, provided he didn't have to touch it, or go aboard it.

For nearly a month the *Battle-Ax* carried an advertisement that read:

HOUSE BOAT FOR SALE!

An elegant, well-built cabin boat is offered for sale to whom it may concern, for a very reasonable price; boat may be inspected at Goose Nest Bend in Fox River on application to Ferryman Purple. *Custodian City Property.*

No price was fixed, for it was felt that any price would be acceptable, though in ordinary circumstances the craft would have been worth five hundred to five hundred and fifty dollars, considering the outfit, supplies and all. But there was no bidder till after the story of the murder mystery had ceased to appear in even the *Police Hints*, where four lines was the maximum length.

Tappan continued to listen on the shanty

boats for some stray river rumor that might help him. He would go to the boats of newcomers, and with the casual, uninquiring river manner, discourse on the stage of the water and the luck of the hunters—all the other things that are unleading questions for any one to speak about, and because he was a river man himself Tappan had many friends among the river people, and the pirates, river rats, and even some kinds of fugitives knew that he demanded only strict observance of Mendova's ordinances along the river front, but no one added anything to the things which he already knew about the dead man.

Then he had an interesting fact to report to the custodian of city property. Happening to be on Fox River at the ferry one day he found a young man standing on Purple's float, looking up and down with wide-eyed interest. Tappan landed against the float, quite as though that had been his intention, and seeing his uniform, the young man walked up to him eagerly, asking:

"Isn't the life in these house boats wonderful?"

"Yes, sir," Tappan replied, gravely and with sincerity. "There's nothing more wonderful down thisaway than shanty boating."

"That's just what I thought! My name is Toskin—Jerald Toskin. I am from New York, but this winter I said to myself that I would not endure the cold. My art course is ended, and I am coming down the Mississippi. I—ah—do you happen to know whether it is possible to purchase a house boat down here?"

"Why, yes—sometimes!" Tappan nodded, and his eyes turned down the bank of the Fox to where he saw the pale blue boat. "There's one for sale now. It's a nice tight boat, not too large, but just right for comfort."

"That blue boat is for sale?" Toskin cried eagerly. "Really? Why, it's a perfect beauty! Did you ever see anything so appropriate for such a river bank as that house boat?"

"It kind of fits into the sceneries, for a fact," Tappan said.

"Who'd sell it?"

"Why—er—it's city property; it be-

longed to a man who—well, he's through with it, and the city custodian has it in charge now."

"Where'll I find the city custodian?"

"I'm his representative, in a way; this is my beat—Fox River, and the Mendova water front; that's the police launch."

"Well, I want that boat. How much is it?"

"It didn't cost less than five hundred and fifty dollars to build and outfit it; it's for sale for seventy-five dollars cash."

"I'll take it! I'll pay you now?"

"Yes, sir—I'll give you a receipt, too," Tappan answered.

Toskin drew a billfold and handed Tappan a fifty, a twenty, and a five dollar bill. Tappan wrote out a receipt, and then took the young man and his suit case down to the boat. Tappan unlocked the door and they entered. The cabin, despite all that had been on board and the investigations, still was permeated with the perfume.

"Why, that's blended attars!" Toskin sniffed. "Isn't it lovely! Did it—was it a woman's?"

"Not as anybody knows of." Tappan shook his head. "Just some shanty boater who dropped in, and—and got his."

"It's just what I've been dreaming about!" Toskin cried. "I'm delighted! You see, Mr. Tappan, I've just finished an art course in New York. For years and years I've longed for the day when I should be able to float with the current down the Mississippi River. There are possibilities down here for an artist—there's an atmosphere, a spirit, which if I could only catch and fix it—um-m! I've been, mostly, an illustrator. I earned considerable in the advertising fields. Now—a dream I've had is come true!"

"Yes, sir, I expect." Tappan nodded. "It's a nice boat!"

"I have some things at the Union Station, and I'll have them brought down here—"

"I'll get them for you," Tappan said, "if they're checked—"

"That 'd be very kind! Here they are—sir!"

Tappan left the man on the shanty boat and went to the landing, where he tele-

phoned to the Union Station, giving the numbers of the checks, and within twenty minutes an express truck arrived with three trunks. Tappan was unusually generous in the matter; the fact was, he didn't want Toskin hiring a darky express drayman to bring trunks to that shanty boat, around which there had already grown up a tradition.

Putting the trunks onto the Sneak, he dropped down to the boat and handed them onto the stern deck. Toskin dragged them through the galley into the main cabin easily, despite their weight. He was a slender, graceful young man, with a pallid countenance, nervous energy and gray-green eyes of large and emerald luster. Tappan observed the strong reaction of the trunks to the energetic grip—here was a healthy youth, as well as a temperamental one.

Tappan showed the boat's fine points with river pride. There was as well found a galley-kitchen-pantry as ever floated old Mississipp', he explained, and he showed the oil stove, the stores of supplies, the tableware and the built-in sleeping car berth, or bunk. From this had been removed all the bedding, but otherwise, Tappan said, it was the finest kind of an outfit.

"Probably they took the bedding for something or other," Tappan remarked, and Toskin said it didn't matter, for he very much preferred to supply his own bedding. He went with Tappan uptown, bought a mattress, sheets, blankets, and everything he needed, including fresh food supplies.

Within three hours of his arrival at Ferry Street, Jerald Toskin was housed and equipped, and so great was his joy that he cast off the lines and floated slowly down Fox River toward the Mississippi, with the Sneak a little way behind, and Tappan scowling and making covert gestures toward the shanty boaters of both the Duck's Nest and Wild Goose Nest localities, who had come forth to see Policeman Tappan's sale of that murder boat to the softpaw who had three trunks with him!

And they saw the little craft emerge from the bayou river into the broad Mississippi, turn half around in the swirl and then edge out into the main current where Tappan held back, leaving the stranger to row with

his sweeps down into the long, lonely bends of the Delta land.

"Ho, law! I wouldn't be in that theh softpaw's shoes, not fo' seven millyun dollars!" Jim Purple voiced the river sentiment, tentatively, when Tappan returned up Fox to hear what people would say.

"He'll get to know old Mississipp'—that's what he wants!" Tappan grinned.

CHAPTER II.

JUST NATURALLY SENTIMENTAL.

"THE river spirits are talking to-night," Denton Rillard remarked to the young lady on the stern of the sacred concert boat Whispering Shoals. "I wish I could understand what they are saying!"

"You—you mean that?" she exclaimed with an odd little break in her voice, and he felt her shiver through the telegraphy of her hand on his elbow.

"Why not?" he answered lightly. "You—a river girl—don't you believe in such things?"

"I was just wondering about you-all," she evaded. "I've been—I've been looking out there myself!"

No two people ever see all the same things tripping down the Mississippi, it is said. Yet there is no doubt that it frequently happens there are many witnesses to a strange phenomenon. These two, Rillard—a sportsman out of the Ohio—and Dona Voane, a river girl, were on a quite common footing—for he had said, at least indicated, the coming to his ears of the low, undulating whisperings where keenest of ears must have felt only silence if they were without reverence, or at least belief.

It was black night, but the darkness was shaded; the river itself was shimmering dusky gray while the trees on the banks were blacker, and the sky was faintly pale. A sound suddenly rained upon them from the sky. It was a flock of wild geese migrating southward, and their *a-lonking*, their trembling, tinkling-bell voices, fell to the Bottoms in a shower that passed by in a minute or two. Probably a score of birds were in the invisible flock—great, beautiful

creatures, lettering the heights, perhaps above the clouds and riding the skies to the light of the stars.

From within the huge craft there sounded human music that seemed far away, and the deck beneath the feet of the two began to throb and spring to the dancing in the great cabin. A whiff of pungent wood smoke caught their nostrils as a current of air came swirling over the roof and around them. The long, heavy stern line which led out to the bank, against which the bow of the hull pressed, strained as a water wave heaved through the dead eddy and raised them.

"You're cold?" he asked quickly. "Permit me—"

"Not cold! Not cold!" she whispered. "Listen!"

A splash miles away, where some bank was lumping off before the wear of the current, a little sucking gurgling, as jets of river current disputed the way, a faint whinnying, as muskrats discoursed down the bank—a number of diverse and readily recognized noises broke the silence that brooded; but she shivered, and he shivered, to the urge of another whole series of voices that were not, perhaps, of the vibrant air.

They drew nearer together, perhaps quite unconsciously; his right arm slipped around her waist under the wrap that was over her shoulders. She did not resist him, when he discovered what he had done, and dared reach with his other arm to draw her to him. No whispering river voices disturbed them in that sudden, unexpected moment. She gave him such a kiss as a river girl knows how to give, possibly no better or more to it than other kisses, but the environment was a bit thrilling, a bit overcoming—

Then, as things happen on the Mississippi in the particular eddies of the river people, a door in the cabin was thrown wide open, and one of those lamps with concave mirror reflectors threw a great rectangle of light right out to where the two were standing. They stood revealed like a love scene, and instantly a man charged along the bright flare, cursing hoarsely.

"Mad Tom—my God!" the girl choked.

No frail man, this one, who had listened with her in the cool of the night while they

sat out a set or two of the dances on the boat! With one hand Rillard gently set the girl to one side into the darkness of the door's shadow, and stepping back one stride, he caught the slender Mad Tom in his stride, and with a tremendous heave lifted him up and headlong over the stern bumper out over the water.

There, for an instant, Mad Tom sprawled in mid-air, like a speared bullfrog, and then, still froglike, he straightened out to his full length, with his hands arrowed above his head, curved, and dived beautifully, as any river rat would instinctively do, with hardly a splash—a veritable otter plunge into the eddy.

Except for the girl's low, terrorized gasp, not a word or sound had been raised. When, a minute later, some one working in the galley came into the corridor store room and found the door wide open, she closed it and left the two again on the stern deck. The girl, in the meanwhile, had dragged Rillard into the shadow, and was whispering in his ears:

"It's Mad Tom! Oh—he'll kill you now! He's bad—that man!"

"Won't he drown?" Rillard asked, wonderingly and with dread.

"Drown! Drown, that scoundrel! He swam the Mississippi a hundred times! He'll swim a hundred yards underwater. You can't drown him. Oh, you can't kill him!"

She broke into a panic of soundless sobbings and shudderings. Rillard, who had come down the Mississippi for no such adventure as this, took her in his arms and sought to comfort her.

"Don't stay, go away—go home!" she gasped. "When he comes you'll not know it—and the first you'll know, you'll be daid—daid!"

"But what ails him?" he asked, still stupidly undivining.

"It's me!" she said fiercely. "He's hounded me down the Missouri from the Yellowstone—and I hate him! Oh, I despise him—and I'm afraid—afraid!"

"Well, I'm not," Rillard said quietly. "We'll go in and dance, won't we?"

"Half his pirate crew are on board. They'd murder you—shoot you down like a

dog, if they knew. They'd be'n out here, hunting you, if they'd known! He'll be ashore—he'll whistle them out, and they'll—"

"No, he won't!" Rillard interrupted her. "When I lifted him I thumbed his neck. Did you see him throw his head back? That's when he felt it, after he'd straightened for his dive. He may never come up—or he may float an hour!"

"You—you—"

"Ju-jued 'im!" Rillard chuckled shortly. "Suppose—if he doesn't come back?"

"Oh, I'll be glad—I'll be glad! He told me, now that we're down on the lower river, he'd have me!"

"The lower river?"

"It's below the jumping-off place—that's why—that's why I came out here—oh, I wanted—I had to have some one to help me! The mission boat's down below—he'd sworn to take me there to marry me! But—but you—you—"

"I fixed him?"

"I hope he's daid!"

"I don't!" he gasped. "I never killed a man—"

"Mad Tom's killed a sight of men! I feared 'im! I feared 'im!"

"Well, let's go dance, then—"

"You've a gun?"

"Oh, yes—a twelve gauge—"

"You've no—no pocket gun?"

"No!"

"Wait!" she whispered, and left him. In two minutes she returned, to reach a belt around his waist, and buckle it on. It was quite three inches wide, folded over and sewed leather, and on his right side, where it fitted like bark on a tree, was a flat, open-top holster of the quick-draw man. In the holster was a heavy revolver.

"Why—what—" he said.

"Daddy's!" she replied. "Before somebody killed him! We're trippin' down alone, mamma an' I! Wear hit, strange! If he's daid, that Mad Tom, yo'll likely not be mistrusted. But if he ain't—an' there's no real killin' that kind, not by drownin', there ain't!"

"My dear, I—you see, I'm—"

"A softpaw. Suttinly!" She understood. "Yo' don't know. But, strange,

when you come a-mixin' up into these yeah riveh things—Lawse, Lawse! I knowed those riveh spirits was a-talkin' somethin' big! Hit's jes' begun, I know hit is. An' those wild geese coming down the sky wind, talkin' while they come! Hit all means somethin'—yes, indeed! Bettah get up the bank, suh; you've had fair warnin' an' now's yo' chance!"

"Things don't happen that way," he exclaimed in amazed disbelief. "It's nothing but a little scrap!"

"A little scrap down thisaway—*sho!* Lots die in them, softpaw! How come hit you drapped into this eddy to-night? How come hit you came down the bar, and saw me? How come hit you laughed a-dancing? They all saw you, strangeh, standing tall an' handsome—proud and high-spirited. Yes, indeed. There's a many prettier than I be, but—but hyar we be an' old Mississipp's done been talking to us! The spirits are laughing—times are picking up down the reaches and bends."

Her voice was low, sweet, gentle and full of the same kind of music he recognized in the song of the wild geese—he wondered what unpoetic scoundrel first called their voice "honking"? She was jeering him, while she told him the things that made him wonder at himself. His own conscience, too, was taunting him. There appeared before his vision a young woman's face, her eyes flaming, her cheeks white with anger, her lips excoriating him for his faithlessness to her. But here he was, as this river girl was reminding him, all tangled up in the meshes of a river scandal.

"I—I didn't mean anything," he gasped with sudden realization. "I—I—"

"Shucks!" she exclaimed. "Come a night like this, and old Mississipp's ha'nts a-talkin'—why, any one is plumb sure to be sentimental. I'd forget and you'd forget—yes, indeedy. I wouldn't think anything. But not Mad Tom! Ho, law—he's bad, that man! Murder was in his heart, because I was here with you, and not with him. I'm just warning you—"

"And—and I haven't hurt your feelings?" he asked.

"Not at all," she answered, dryly. "It's just the way of old Mississippi—that's all!"

"It's enough."

"Yes, indeedy—you'll think so if Mad Tom ain't daid!"

"And you're—you're just a river girl?"

"That's a heap to be, strangeh—a riveh girl! I've been up the bank—I spent five years in particular Hades, being educated. I know my books, if that's what you mean. But it seems like—seems as though I hadn't stepped on our shanty boat deck when things began to happen. Hit's ol' Mississipp'!"

"Why don't you leave it?"

"As to that, I love it! It's born in me, bred in me—I left it with my feet a-dragging, and I stepped light—yes, indeed, coming back! But you—Mad Tom 'll hound you down if he's daid, and he'll hound you down if he's alive!"

"I think I'll go down to New Orleans," he said decisively.

"Don't say I didn't warn you." She shrugged her shoulders. "When you go through that door, step quick! Mad Tom may be there on the bank, waiting to get a shot at you—and remember, suh, you've a gun of your own now!"

"And for that I'm a thousand times obliged to you. I'm sorry if—"

"That's all right—if you hadn't done what you did, I just 'lowed I'd have to do hit myse'f. No man takes me to the mission boat to be married till I'm ready. No, indeedy! Lawse, I was just mad myself, wishing he'd know—know—strangeh! I'd kiss you again if—if—"

"I wish I could tell you what it meant to me—"

"I 'low I understand; you've a girl back home, I bet, and—"

"How'd you know?"

"*Sho!*" She laughed lightly. "You called me Corilla—and my name is Dona Voane. Now, let's go in and dance again—and listen for a whistle up the bank."

It was supper time, and as they entered, the music ceased while the couples sorted themselves out for the eating. Planks laid along carpenters' horses served for tables, and every one sat on boxes, or chairs, or folding stools, while steaming coffee was poured into a great variety of cups, from plain tin to nicked Chinese and Japanese

ware. Roast coon, roast duck, roast pork, and a dozen kinds of hot bread, sweet and spud potatoes—there was plenty to eat, and great appetites waited to enjoy what was had.

There was a hush, however, when Rillard sat down with Dona Voane, and with courtesies, brought to her plate the things she desired to eat. Some of the men grinned, but some glared about with sudden quickness of observation. It was sensational, this moment.

"Say, Pete, where's Tom—Tom Maiton?" a shrill, feminine voice startled the sudden quiet.

"Jes' what I was wondering," Pete Davlo replied with a grin.

All the spectators turned to gaze at Rillard, the sport, and Dona, who were apparently quite oblivious to the interest taken in them. Their indifference was just a little too obvious.

"Where's Mad Tom?" a whisper rippled around the big kitchen-dining room. "Who's seen Mad Tom—Tom Maiton?"

Two men scrambled up, and with covert glances at Rillard went around the table ends, through the concert-dance hall, and in the quiet their quick footsteps sounded loudly as they drummed up the landing stage to go along the bank to their boat. They were pals of Mad Tom.

They returned a few minutes later, having been heard whistling and calling around. Their faces were dark with anger and suspicion. One of them stopped, and looking steadily at Dona, demanded:

"Say, Dona, did you-all see him?"

"Who?" She looked up quickly. "Who'd I see?"

"Tom—Tom Maiton?"

"Why, yes; he was here. I saw him prancin' around, same's always. Stepping light and throwing himself, just like he thought he was somebody."

"—'Course—'course!" the man exclaimed, startled by the tone. "We all saw him, but where'd he go?"

"I don't know, Jim Taken, unless he was scairt out!"

"Wha—what! Mad Tom scairt of anybody! Why, that man—"

"I beg your pardon," Rillard interrupted,

rising to his feet, "there's your chair over there, and yours, Mr. Man, is right yonder! The ladies are sure missing your company!"

The two river men, standing together, opened their mouths and their eyes. Then, with sudden clicking of teeth and squinting of eyes, they dropped their hands, but Rillard was before them. He drew the big-mouthed revolver which Dona had handed him, and with a careless flourish beckoned the two once more to the seats where they belonged.

"Go talk to your own friends, you men," Rillard suggested softly. "Mad Tom has gone swimming, and if he comes back, you tell him for me that after this he'd better mind his own business, and all his pack of river rats. Is that perfectly plain?"

"Gone swimmin'—gone a-swimmin'! Mad Tom's daid?" Jim gasped. "Lawse, strange! I—we meant no 'fense, suh!"

"That's all right, boys; we're all friends; there's no need of being mean or having trouble. I'm a softpaw, I believe you call it, but where I came from no man ever talks to a lady, or looks at a lady, the way you looked at Miss Voane. Just tell her you're sorry, and it 'll be all right."

"No 'fense, Mi—Miss Dona!" Jim blinked, wetting his lips. "I shore didn't 'low to—to make yo' mad, no, indeedy!"

"All right, Jim; Mr. Rillard's a good friend of mine, and we're both of us plumb peaceable, and so don't try no tricks, for you know, I'm no softpaw; an', Jim, jes' about gettin' started bad an' mean myse'f."

"Yes'm." He blinked, and the two went to their seats.

Instantly every one began to eat, rattling dishes and talking in short, shrill gasps. The amazing things they had seen and heard made them talk of everything else but the clash between the softpaw and Mad Tom's two mates, Jim Taken and Date Imsal. With smiling eyes Rillard had bluffed them, called them, and ordered them around as he might have sent a pair of dogs to lie down.

No one really believed he could get away with any such talk as that, but he had done it, and the two pirates were gulping down their unchewed food, handing it in with both knife and fork, while the women by their side nibbled and flushed with embar-

rasment that their companions should find themselves in such a predicament of helplessness.

Rillard was fairly unconscious of his position in the river society. He was less perturbed by the enmity of the pirate shanty boaters, whose undersized physiques and cringing bearing under his own stern frown and daring mislead him somewhat as to their desperation, than he was by another phase of his conduct which, the more he thought about it, the less he admired himself—and especially the worse off he became as a matter of conscience.

The young woman, Dona Voane, sitting beside him, had done herself less than her deserts when she said there were many prettier than she. She was of medium height; wavy, light brown hair was massed upon her head—and it was a wonderfully well-rounded head, her brows being broad and high, and her eyes full of lambent colors that changed with her every mood; among them all she was very dainty and tactful in her table manners, and her voice, despite a dialect that she often exaggerated in order to overcome her distinct enunciation and her clearness of tone—she was hiding all the time the education and the training she had had up the bank, somewhere.

Rillard knew that she was what she seemed, and that she was a great deal more than what she tried to claim to be. Yet none of these attributes explained his own inexplicable behavior now that he was tripping down old Mississipp', enjoying its splendors, but becoming more and more entangled in its surface affairs. He recalled his remarks on the whispering river voices, and the music of the passing flight of wild geese still rang in his ears—but he was suffocated nearly by the fact that he had taken this young woman in his arms and kissed her.

"And I'm respectable—I'm married—good Lord!" he choked to himself, and, on the other hand, he had not deceived Dona; in fact, he had called her Corilla as of the habit of his honorable intentions.

It seemed to him as though the night were full of chuckles, and the people were all laughing at him—as indeed Dona was laughing at him, as well as regarding him

with amused admiration. He knew she was regarding him with a gentle ridicule, for her bearing was one of teasing. He could hardly believe the things he knew were true, but that weight of a beautiful, heavy revolver on his hip was undeniable.

He had plunged pell-mell into the feuds and fancies of river living.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARTIST PRACTICES.

JERALD TOSKIN, having cut loose from the bank of the Mississippi, floated down the midstream, and breathed deeply in the inspiration of his wonderful experience. At last, with ample funds for a year or two of river studies, he was about to come into his own field of endeavor.

"These magnificent distances—can I ever show that monster flood?" he asked himself, gazing in awe at the coiling and swirling of the surface eddies, led in his glance to the miles distance down the visible slope of the sweeping current.

He seized charecoal and tacked up a sheet of drawing paper on his board, to try by sketches to catch the spirit of the things which presented themselves to his eyes. He tried broad lines and fast strokes—and then seized a sharp pencil tip and essayed the effect with fine, hard lines on a smooth calendered surface, which he soon covered with India ink—and regarded the dozen sketches he had made with equal disfavor, since the reality was so much more wonderful than the mere suggestion of lines and shades and strokes.

He forgot to eat his lunch, he was so busy with his art; he studied the swirls of the surface and watched the diminishing spirals of the little sucks; he dropped on his hands and knees, to look over side and close at hand at the spreading of the boiling glaze, when jets from the bottom poured up and swept out upon the surface in great, circling figures of many shapes, trying to catch the lines of the crinkling edges and the weaving masses of silt as they fell into shapes of their own weave; he leaned against the cabin of his boat and looked at the low banks, with their shadows of

overhang and purple mass, with their tangles of tree roots, exposed by the washing away of the earth, dooming the forest in miles of caving bend; and on approaching an island he saw on the right hand a wide, vast lake in motion, and down the chute, on the other, a rippling little river sparkling in the sunshine—and a thousand effects, a thousand spectacles, challenged his skill and doomed him to the eternal strife of doing with a few pigments and all the paints and brushes available, what the river was undertaking to show, using the floods of a thousand valleys, the light of the sun and the shadows of cyclone and hurricane clouds for its master effects.

"Oh, yes!" Toskin blinked, when in the twilight following sunset he rowed into an island eddy and heaved an anchor overboard near the edge of the main current. "There's no doubt in my mind that there are pictures down here—for one to paint! My land—and I didn't take a photograph! I've been fussing with sketching when I ought to have made photographs!"

His heart sank within him as he wondered if he should ever again see just precisely those same effects that had charmed and baffled him all the afternoon. He caught up the work that he had attempted, and by lamplight, without the spectacle of the reality to shame his work by the truth, he was startled to see, and especially to feel, in what he had done an undertone of spirit that just suggested itself to him—an atmosphere of expression which lifted him to his tiptoes, for it might mean at last a rudiment of style and themes of his own.

Those sketches, hasty, crude, and even to some extent snatches of the most commonplace phenomena of the flood mass and far perspectives of the Mississippi did reveal to him the fact that all his dreaming, all his expenditure, all his efforts were worth while, and if he were to leave the river at this very moment he should not have come in vain. A few quick scratches, a sweep of charcoal, a twist of the hand—as long as he lived, that one bit, surrounded by a dozen other attempts, would inspire him with hope and confidence, for he had seen and recorded in it the effect of a dozen acres of the Mississippi surface, with its ripples

and breaks and reflections of the wilderness along the banks.

He went about cooking supper. It was surprising, now that he thought of eating, how rapidly his hunger increased, and he broiled his steak over the red-hot plate of his oil stove, fried potatoes, percolated coffee and made ample preparations to appease his ravenous appetite. Having dined, he leaned back in a luxurious arm chair that was part of the boat's outfit, and before he knew it, he was asleep. Never in his life had he had a more engrossing day, and never had he been more tired.

It was after midnight when he awakened. He looked around him, and was a minute or two resolving his dreams of exhibitions in art galleries that were miles long and down both banks of the Mississippi, into the fact of his being afloat in a shanty boat. He sat up and looked around himself with some satisfaction. On a shelf in one corner of the room were several newspapers, and he went to gather these up to read a little, not realizing how long he had been lying there.

There were five or six of the papers, and they showed that they had been carried around in peoples' pockets. He opened one of them, and there across the full breadth of the first page was the headline:

MYSTERIOUS RIVER MURDER!

Shanty Boater Victim of Shot While He
Sleeps on Bunk!

It was an account hurriedly thrown together by an evening newspaper reporter and gave the salient details of the discovery and mystery of the river crime. Toskin read the story with interest, though horrible things had never attracted his fancy.

The other newspapers contained other accounts of the investigation into the circumstances of the homicide, and there in the columns of the *Trade-Caller* was a picture of the shanty boat, a photograph of the victim, and more discussion of the Mississippi River's *penchant* for strange and inexplicable crimes—here was a man who had been murdered while he slept! Shanty boaters declared a river man would have felt the boat shake and been awakened by any one coming aboard, no matter how

silently and carefully, since a touch will make the floating craft vibrate noticeably.

Toskin needed no back to his chair as he read down this second day story. Over and over again he looked at the picture, and there crept into his thoughts the feeling that he must have seen that boat somewhere, but not till he saw, in a still later paper, a statement that the custodian of public property would offer the mystery murder boat for sale, did it really occur to him that when he purchased this beautiful house boat, all neatly painted, all wonderfully equipped, from the harbor policeman, he had acquired the very craft of that newspaper sensation.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed, looking around him. "Murder—ugh!"

Reading tragedy at midnight on the Mississippi, especially Mississippi River's own strange brands of horrible circumstances, is not to be recommended save for those people who are seeking sensations. Toskin, whether he knew it or not, was undergoing a bit of river lore.

When he looked at the bunk, he could see there the dim outlines of the very picture of the murder victim, so vivid was his imagination. He felt himself shrinking and the cold chills painting goose pimples along his thighs and across the back of his shoulders.

His lips were dry, his throat dusty as alkali, but when he started to walk out into the dark and gloomy kitchen, where there was a water pail, but no light, he stiffened where he sat, unable to move. Fear gripped him—terror that grew within till the very beating of his heart was thunder in the silence of the cabin in the river quiet.

Jerald Toskin had trifled a little with séances and mediumistic phenomena, and sometimes he had seen a Ouiji board spell out things which were startling and inexplicable. The flutter of a curtain, moved by invisible powers, the lifting of a table under the gentle urge of a circle of hands, whose finger tips were on it, messages across the border land of ultimate adventure were all well enough with one's own people around, but here in this boat!

"Good land! Good land!" Toskin breathed. "That—that blamed old cop!

That blamed old cop! That's why everybody was rubbering—ah-ah!"

He heard something; it sounded as though his anchor rope was stretching when a current in the eddy pulled the shanty boat about; he felt a cold wave, and no iceberg out of Greenland ever made a man shudder more than Toskin. He turned his head from side to side, and he reverted to another look at the bunk on which, he had read, murder had been done.

"It's the boat—my boat! My Gawd!" he thought, and the hollow groan of his voice checked him where he sat. He trembled, and as he trembled, he forced himself to rise and walk steadily out into the kitchen, and around the end of the partition into the pale shadow and drink till his thirst was assuaged with the water. Then he returned to the chair and resumed his seat. He picked up the newspaper and read the several accounts of the results of a ghastly tragedy.

When out of his subconsciousness welled up whole flood tides of fears and dreads, he forced himself calmly to reason with himself, and urge away the terror by bringing in the reign of his judgment. But that fight which he made with himself in those long hours left its mark on his very soul. He won out, but not by banishing the spectres from him.

Instead, he accepted their presence; he told himself that far and wide across the earth are the dismal places of violence and cruelty and hate; down the Mississippi, especially, he was traversing the realms of ten thousand steamboat, war time and individual tragedies; if he would do all these things full justice, it would not be merely by pretty drawing and coloring of charming, forceful current lines, the crumbling down of undermined banks, the pitiful circumstance of giant, beautiful trees ready to fall in their prime into the eddies; more than these gentle beauties, he must show the darkness of the deeps and the protest of the losers.

And when he had come to this resolution he was astonished at the change he found in his attitude. He leaned forward on his fist, his elbow on his knee and gazed steadfastly at that bunk in the corner, against the kitchen partition. He was not trying

to see anything; he was trying to understand the situation; he knew, from the papers which reporters and detectives had left on board, all that was known generally about the matter; but the river knew the answer—that great flood pouring by just knew everything!

He walked out on the stern deck, closed the door behind him and looked as the glare of the lamplight faded in his eyes out across the waters. At first he could see nothing, and then he saw more and more clearly another most wonderful spectacle—the river night: the waters glimmered, the far wilderness seemed to be astir, the near ripple down the chute was whispering like many voices, scarcely audible; there was as perfect a river individuality in the night gloom as by the flare of day.

The river, however, was not through with Jerald Toskin—not by any possible means was he a finished river man. He had fought his superstition, he had overcome it, and he stood just a little too calm, just a little too proud of his heroic accomplishment. Old Mississippi saw him, sure enough.

From somewhere right around him came a cry, low and thrilling:

"He'p! He'p!"

Toskin nearly collapsed, as with bulging eyes he leaned forward and gaped out over the water.

"He'p! He'p!" the voice repeated, high and squeaky, like a bird's. "I cain't git to move. He'p! He'p!"

The artist, all ready to begin his great career, now that his studies were over, leaned to see—and yet he was sure in his very soul that if he saw anything it would be with his mind's eye, and that any reply he might have to make to that cry must be with the voice of his soul alone.

"It's the murdered spirit!" he thought to himself. "Good Lord—what can I do? What 'll I say to comfort 'im?"

He projected his ideas into space, and wished that he had paid more attention to the telepathic questions of the day, and wildly he groped about in his mind for the proper forms of polite address at such a moment.

Then, over the side, he heard a splashing in the water; he heard the spattering of

something afloat and uneasy; right by him he heard a whispering wail:

"He'p! He'p! I'm a-drownin'!"

Toskin leaned far over and looked, and there right under him was a face, a mortally white, peaked face, with eyes that fairly glowed as they bulged.

"My Gawd! My Gawd!" Toskin gurgled. "What next?"

There it was, and as two hands were lifted slowly, the face submerged, and instantly there was a bubbling and gurgling. One long, white, bony hand brushed against the side of the boat, and the finger tips worked around and along the planking till they found the slight little crack, where a splinter had broken out. There they hooked in, and the face emerged above the surface again.

The other hand came squirming up out of the water, rising higher and higher, and as the face turned over, the back of a man's head showed. Sputtering, choking, gurgling, the figure reached up and a white hand hooked over the top of the gunwale.

Straining there, it was joined by the other, and Toskin drew back with his own two hands, with long, delicate fingers drawn bone-rigid, rising before him in deep-breathed mortal expectation.

The river was pale, the banks of earth were revealed beneath the now visible massive trunks of trees; a few yards distant, stretching away upstream, was the gray distances of a sand bar, turning yellow and bluish toward the low switch willows.

If it had still remained dark, there is no telling what Jerald Toskin would have endured, or whether his excitement and experience would have proved too much for him, but this was the short moment of a lower Mississippi dawn; daylight was coming on apace, and in a moment sunshine swept like a golden haze through the top twigs of the 'longshore forests.

The livid, pale hands crawled and reached, straining over the gunwale, and alongside was the gasping and groaning of something, perhaps a man, in the awful struggle of a heart reluctant to die, but weakened and growing breathless.

Toskin slowly realized that this was daytime; he found it hard to overcome the

tense belief that the thing was a river spirit; but when the truth dawned on him he sprang and seized the wrists of the figure, and with a strength he did not know he possessed, lifted the bedraggled figure over the side, and then stretched him out on the deck.

It was, indeed, a man—a man pale and shriveled by hours and hours of floating in the water. The necessity of struggling ended, the body fluttered a little, and the eyes closed in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN A MAN HAS DONE SOMETHING.

BY chance, merely, a number of shanty boats had landed in the eddy where merry-making had instantly sprung up, the arrival of the Whispering Shoals, a ninety-foot amusement craft, making the inclusion of dancing perfectly inevitable. Painted along the proportionately low cabin's side of the huge ark were the words:

SACRED CONCERT BOAT.

A year or two previous to this day the Whispering Shoals had come down the river with a troupe of song birds on board, stopping at landings and giving entertainments that neither love nor money would supply in any ordinary theater up the banks. Several were actually members of church choirs, and others were trained stage singers. It was a great lark, this trip down the Mississippi, and audiences at plantation landings heard music they would remember many a day.

Now the boat belonged to the Frindals, who threw the craft wide open to whatever merriment was in the wind. Dick Frindal looked on all the doings with half closed blue eyes, while his wife exchanged with him looks of humor at some river antic or exploit on their hospitable floor. They had two hired deck hands and a woman cook—wife of one of the hands. Rumor said they were just a couple of rich folks, seeing the river; other whispers said that they were living out, scouting down till some ill wind blew over. At least, they were good sports and no one would ever forget the winter the

Frindals tripped the Whispering Shoals out of Evansville down to N'Orleans.

With her bow to the bank, and bow and stern lines run off to port and starboard, steadying her, held off by a long, wheeled and banistered gangplank, the concert boat was the nucleus of a shanty boat town, or Duck Nest. Other boats were moored along the bank, up and down the eddy, and there were two or three more boats against the sand bar a hundred yards or so away, and nearer the main river current.

Having danced the dark into day again, the river trippers emerged from the dance hall and walked up onto the bank, there to turn to their own craft. The spirit of merriment had hardly flagged at all; the women were laughing and talking, the men were still stepping to the tunes that ran in their heads. When a great fox squirrel suddenly scampered up a tall cottonwood in alarm, seven or eight of the men snatched out revolvers or automatics and began to shoot a wild fusillade that chipped twigs, gashed the bole bark and plugged into the body wood. In chattering fear the squirrel raced madly up and along a diminishing branch, leaped a dozen feet out and down, caught another branch, and having lost four or five inches of its tail, which fluttered down, it made its frightened way to safety, while one of the shooters picked up the fluffy trophy, plucked out the bone and handed the plume to his companion.

Denton Riillard, strolling along with Dona Voane, "seeing her home," after the manner of the world-wide privilege, found her boat nearly half a mile downstream at the very foot of the eddy, and where occasional swirls of the main current swung in far enough to press the hull more firmly against the bank.

It was a house boat, about thirty-six feet long, ten wide, and the hull was at least three feet above the water surface. On the roof were elk horns and a wild mountain sheep's head. Under the cabin porch roof hung some ears of corn braided in their shocks. Along both sides of the boat were two running boards, relic of old keel-boat days, and along the cabin were hooks on which rested pikes of lodge-pole pine, one at least twenty feet in length.

A far traveler, this boat! It looked the journey it had made down the great length of the Missouri. That two women had floated it down most of the way was almost incredible, but such was the fact. The mother of Dona walked out on the bow deck as the two approached and fixed Rillard with the squinting stare of her suspicious eyes—her visage was dark, aquiline and betrayed the faintest dash of Indian, and a great deal of Latin—probably French.

"Mr. Rillard, mother!" Dona introduced them. "He's the sport we heard about—coming down out of the Ohio."

"Glad to met you, Mr. Rillard," the elder woman nodded, not ungraciously. "I expect you-all think shanty boating is right amusing, don't you?"

"It's a liberal education, I should say," he said, and at that the girl laughed lightly, saying:

"Mad Tom Maiton's pirates were mostly there, and Mr. Rillard—sho, mother, he was there first and it left me nothing to do!"

"You had it out?" Mrs. Voane inquired quickly.

"Mad Tom was mean—and fell overboard; Jim Taken and Date Imsal grew impudent, but went and sat by their lady friends when Mr. Rillard told them to."

The sharp suspicion in Mrs. Voane's eyes relaxed, and her lips smiled sincerely. There was relief in her expression, too, and Rillard, unable to conceal his wonderment, was invited on board their boat to breakfast, ostensibly, but in fact to hear the brief narrative of the mother.

Over their huckwheat cakes and pork sage sausage Mrs. Voane said:

"It's real friendly of you, taking up this matter for us; Mad Tom's always been mean about Dona here; he 'lowed he'd sure get to marry her when she was only twelve years old, and we were on Illinois River. Daddy sent her to school, thinking that scoundrel would sure forget, but he never did—and account of Dona growing prettier, nobody could rightly blame him. But Dona feared and despised him. Last night, knowing they'd be coming down—for they've trailed us a thousand miles—she went to the dance. I dassent to leave the boat alone, for they'd pirate it, just to worry

us, and leave us begging for a night aboard some friend's boat. Dona carried her daddy's gun—I see you're wearing it, Mr. Rillard. Is Mad Tom daid?"

"He went a-swimming," Dona laughed. "Came charging like a huck deer, with his head down—Lawse! Mr. Rillard stepped to one side and hoisted him—up and out—"

"He could swim like a fish! Like an otter!" Mrs. Voane exclaimed, disappointed.

"But before letting him go he twitched his neck," Dona added.

"An' he drowned!"

"If he came up, he didn't come splash-ing," Dona shook her head. "It 'd be like old Mississip' to drown him—but he's a fish in the water."

After breakfast Rillard went to his own craft, a pretty, cruising motor boat, model hull and driven by a screw propeller. It was swinging from the stern deck of Charlie Books's pink storeboat, because the draft was pretty deep for landing against the hank. As he approached the storeboat, Mrs. Mamie Books opened the door for him, and closed it behind him as she beckoned him into the cabin behind the store, with its shelves and counter.

"Mr. Man!" Charlie Books whispered. "You've sure done something. Don't you know that Jim Taken and Date Imsal will kill you-all in cold blood? Why, they're"—his voice lowered—"they're riveh pirates of Mad Tom's crew! Lawse—nobody knows how many or who's of them! If Mad Tom 'd be'n theh you'd neveh left that boat alive—"

"Well, Mad Tom wasn't there," Rillard suggested.

"Sho—what!"

"But he was!" Mrs. Mamie turned to her husband, her eyes widening. "Long early, he was theh—I danced with him."

The two turned to look at Rillard. He made no comment, and they dared ask no questions; yet they were alert to the possibilities of the situation, to the subtle hint in his one statement that Mad Tom was gone when he defied the two river scoundrels.

"Have a cup of coffee?" Mrs. Mamie suggested, and he assented, but explained

that he had just eaten breakfast on board the Voane boat.

"You di-id?" Mamie cried, once more surprised. "Ho, law—man! You're flying high, but coming down to light where Mad Tom sure 'lowed is his own country!"

Then, rather than embarrass their visitor, they told what a fine dance it had been, how they enjoyed the music, and how the winter down the river was going to be like old times, as in the days when anybody could kill all the wild fowl he wanted, and when every brake and bayou was alive with fur and game. Then Rillard went home to his boat to rest.

Late in the day, when he awakened, most of the shanty boaters were up and busy; blue smoke poured out of the stovepipes in the roofs, and there was wood-chopping on the bank; there was high-pitched, feminine singing, a weird, low strain of a fiddle, several whistlers vying with one another in their warblings and thrills and piercing shrills. The sky was a bit misty, and the sun was shining with diffused whiteness upon the tawny flood, the downstream reach thickening till the faraway bend was but a faint, hardly visible hue of pale blue.

Mad Tom, Charlie Books said, had disappeared. His gang were together on their gasolines and shack boats against the sand bar, talking among themselves. Their surly aspect, and their low growling as they looked out at the sport's motor boat Jungle left little to the imagination.

"They're mean," Books declared. "When you get down the river alone, look out! Keep yo' eyes open, Mr. Man! They 'low you tricked them. But if Mad Tom's daid, they'll scatter. An' they's afeared of you—yes, indeedy! Five, ten of them saw yo' bluff down Jim Taken an' Date Imsal. Ho, law! I wouldn't o' missed seein' that, not fo' a bale of beaver skins! Lawse! They'll neveh front yo' to yo' face—no, indeedy! But bushwhackin'—shoot-in' from behind! Don' yo' turn yo' back on any man yo' don't know—an' neveh follow the same road twicet; neveh tell any man where yo'll stop, where yo'll go, or when yo'll come back. an' come night, pull down yo' curtains, shut the do'r, an' when yo' step outside have no light behind yo'!"

3 A

Rillard looked up and down the river; he went out on the bank and talked the time of day with his fellows; he strolled down the bank with an assumption of ease that he did not feel, and sitting on the bow deck of the Voane boat, heard from Dona's own lips a repetition of the warning that Books had given him. It thrilled his love of venture to hear her concern about his jeopardy; as a boy he had dreamed of fronting desperate and treacherous enemies; now the reality was all that his boyish imagination had pictured to him. It was quite as incredible, but the reality was not to be questioned.

He was a participant in a river feud.

One other thing struck his fancy with satisfaction: it was all a river affair. He was more than a thousand miles from home. He was with a kind of people of whose existence he had never read, though he had heard occasional rumors that river shanty boaters were a strange class; certainly, there was hardly a chance of the rumor of anything he did down there reaching his faraway home town to alarm his friends and delight his few and unimportant enemies.

The feeling that he would never be found out threw a glamor over his condition, and added to the discomfiture of his conscience. No harm could come of this affair. He would not be shot, or killed—he would attend to that; courage and alertness would be with him, and when, toward sunset, he saw the dirty little shanty boat, the two stern wheel scows and the old, weathered gasoline launch of the pirate fleet pull out into the eddy and turn across into the main current he was completely satisfied.

They had not remained there to have it out with him; the eddy was not large enough for them, the Voanes and himself. The pirates had fled, and it was a real psychological victory. When the pirates were vanishing in the thickening down the reach, the shanty boaters gathered in groups and exclaimed among themselves. Dona turned and laughed aloud as she looked with roguish frankness into Rillard's eyes.

"They've gone. Yo' sure scairt 'em out, Mr. Man! Mother an' I sure must thank you, suh! They 'lowed yo' came down here to ask how yo' could help us—"

"I was really wondering just that," he admitted.

"And they knew it. You're being friendly with us. If Mad Tom's daid, it 'll stop any one from pesterin' mother and I any more. I wish I could do as much for you, stranger."

The word *stranger* gave the wish just exactly the right balance; the visitor returned, with the coming of dusk, to his own boat and pondered on the ways of the Mississippi with all its people.

CHAPTER V.

A FAVOR TO A RIVER PIRATE.

JERALD TOSKIN lifted and carried the inert body of the man out of the river into his cabin, and there managed to put him to bed. He found under his clothes a money belt thick and wet with currency that had long been saturated, and this money he spread out over the oil stove in the kitchen to dry it. There were two automatic pistols of small size, light in weight, but of exceedingly efficient design, and these Toskin took apart and cleaned.

Tired out with his night's vigil, exhausted by his terror and struggle with his fears, he, too, turned in to sleep, and slept for hours. When night fell, and he awakened, the other man was lying less like a dead man, and breathing deeply, sleeping off the effects of whatever his own weariness had been. He slept all that night, while Toskin spent the evening sitting back in the corner of the cabin, his sketching easel before him, and making notes of the exact scene in that room.

He knew, now, with an artist's instinct that he had been blessed with what no imagination could have raised up for portrayal—or at least, only a genius could have dreamed. He had seen the river spirits, he had heard their voices, and he had, at the same time, come into his own material for the delineating of the Mississippi in its phase of psychological mystery and its fearfulness of actual living aspects. That white hand coming up out of the dark depths, and hooking over the gunwale, would ever remain as one of his most pre-

cious notes for drawing into any picture of terror or strain that he might desire to embellish.

Realism—he should now never lack for the gaunt, livid truth of a man's physical exhaustion, and, he knew, if he ever drew a picture of the Mississippi, it would contain the most careful, exact kind of drawing, but it would also contain the subtlety of atmosphere and the spirit of mystery—no matter how much he would put into any breadth of canvas, or spread of paper, there would lurk in and under and around his subject the shadow that is so much more than substance, the suggestion that is far more than the mere lines and colors.

It had been a small price to pay for what he had gained during that awful night of realities! Through the years his agitation, his fear, his almost lost fight with the cowardice that is every man's trial would stand with him. When a man has won such a decisive victory over himself, he may count on a thousandfold greater strength—perhaps an utter calm—in whatever emergency may arise to try him. He may even go into the inevitable peril that becomes irresistible attack. He may die, but with unflinching steadfastness since he has been prepared for that by an agony of terror, long since met and overcome.

Toskin still felt the brooding menace of the river night; he was wholly conscious of the possibilities of the dark, of the murder shanty boat, of the unseen; but he was not afraid. He could with quiet observation study his own reactions to the new sounds, the new spirits, the more sensitive feelings; instead of mere glimpses and glances of impressions, he now analyzed the things that gave him these feelings, and when he sketched the simple, attractive interior of the boat, with that white face on the bunk, he added—as a note to jog his memory—a tiny bell, uptilted as though ringing, to show that he was listening to bell-like music out across the river—not really instrumental music, but the ringing tread and the booming march of the vast river flood swinging down reach and bend to its rest in the Gulf of Mexico.

Almost unconsciously he sketched that bell in one corner of the cabin, but after-

ward, looking at it, he knew that if he never made another sketch of the river—that bell showed how much he understood, and how far he had come in knowing whereof he longed to speak.

Swinging a canvas hammock across the cabin, Toskin rolled up in a blanket and went sound to sleep. In the morning something awakened him, and opening his eyes, he found himself looking up into the face of the man he had dragged out of the eddy. In the man's hand was his own butcher knife, and he was merely hesitating to drive the blade into his host's breast.

"Good morning," Toskin greeted the man, looking him in the eyes.

"Where's my money belt?" the fellow demanded.

"It was all wet when I pulled you out of the river," Toskin answered. "I spread the bills on the rack over the stove—where you'll find them."

On the instant the river rat backed away and took a quick glance at the kitchen, where, sure enough, the currency was crinkled up, well dried—several thousand dollars in bills of various denominations. At sight of it, he sprang and rapidly stacked it to pack it in the stained but fairly soft horsehide money belt. He counted it, and he was satisfied with the result. Not a dollar was missing.

In the meanwhile Toskin reached over into a wall pocket and drew out his own automatic, swung to his feet, and as the man looked up, leveled the dark brown muzzle at him.

"You scoundrel—hands up! Kill me for rescuing you, will you?"

"Don't—don't shoot!" The fellow dropped his knife and fell to his knees. "I 'lowed yo'd—yo'd stoled my money! Don't shoot!"

Toskin ordered him to put on the belt, and made him sit down in a chair, while he himself dressed. Murder had been in the very poise of the fellow, and Toskin, somehow, had found river discretion in his short but terrific shanty boat experience. Dressed, he told the man to dress in the clothes which Toskin had carefully dried.

"You were floating down, and came into this eddy," Toskin explained. "I heard

you groaning, just before daybreak, and you drifted against my boat. You hung fast, but you'd sank back in, shortly. I dragged you on board, took you in here, and fed you; I let you sleep on my own bed—and for thanks you would have stabbed me while I slept! Who are you?"

"Tom—Tom Maiton!" the fellow answered as he cringed.

"A river rat!"

"Yas, suh!"

"And all the good it does to do you a favor is to give you a chance to murder your benefactor?"

"I 'lowed yo'd took my money."

"If I had—you'd murdered the victim if you found that much money on him! You're alive—and you thought I'd robbed you, helpless as you were?"

"I 'lowed yo' had, suh."

"Because you'd done it, you thought I would—that any man would! Where did you learn to mistrust men so much?"

"On ol' Mississipp'—all oveh!"

"Well, if you were in my place, what would you do?"

"The job 'd be'n done, long sincet!" Maiton grinned, with a flicker at his own humor, "Yo'd neveh come to, no, suh!"

"I believe you. Now, if I let you go, I suppose you'll stab me the first chance you get—or shoot me?"

Maiton hesitated and stared at the floor. What could he say? He rolled his eyes up at last—they were half bulging in their deep, sunk sockets—they wavered, and a rat-tail grin whipped along his lips as he nodded.

"I expect, suh!"

He was telling the truth, and it was the only way he could repay the man who had saved his life—it was the truth of the moment, however. Toskin was delving deep into the heart thought of the wretch. To him had been given, as to few softpaws on the river, the privilege of getting to know old Mississipp' in the snarling moods of its ways, and he knew it—he was grateful for it; nor did he bear any resentment against the man now. In fact, he read back into the years of privation, of suffering, of losing fight against odds on the river, of a weak physique struggling to keep alive against

the awful law of the survival of the fittest. He *had* survived—he was surviving now, by the very sincerity of his admissions. He was learning to meet Toskin on Toskin's own terms—for there was no other way.

Unable to look back at Toskin's frank and studious inspection, Maiton rolled his eyes around, and his glance fell on the easel where rested the wide sheet of drawing paper, covered over with the sketch of the bunk, the corner of the cabin, the hanging curtain by the window, and the glaring white face that centered and held his vision.

Maiton's jaw dropped, his eyes crawled out of their sockets like turtle heads, and he staggered to his feet, staring at the picture. It was a wonderful likeness, that hasty sketch! Having looked at it, Maiton's gaze wandered up and down, and around the cabin. He looked at the carlings supporting the matched board, canvas-covered roof; he glanced at the cabin walls, and shrank away from each side in turn; he drew down, his back humping, as he fixed his eyes upon the bunk, blinking again and again.

"This boat—this shanty boat—where all 'd yo' get to buy hit, misteh?" he asked.

Toskin stood straighter a little and looked at the fellow with a quick, birdlike glance of amused comprehension. Maiton knew that cabin interior, and he was undergoing tortures in the recognition. The artist knew, now, how well he had drawn the face and figure of the wretched river man, recuperating in almost deathlike sleep on that bunk.

"Where'd yo' git hit?" Maiton pleaded. "Not to—not to Mendova?"

"It's one the city custodian had for sale. It's a dandy, isn't it?" Toskin smiled as he put this question.

"Ah—ah!" Maiton gasped, and then asked, pointing at the picture: "Where all'd yo' see that man—lyin' theh—so?"

For an instant Toskin hesitated, and then reached to a shelf and handed him the newspaper, with the picture of the murdered man in it.

"There's the picture, but you know that's your own face."

"Lawse! Lawsy!" Maiton whimpered. "I knowed hit's my face, but a daid man's on a daid man's bed! An—an' yo've hearn

no voices—seen nobody here, 'ceptin' me—no night flyers have come a-visitin' yo'?"

"Oh, as to that—you see that bell?"

"Yas, suh!"

"I heard it ringin'—not a real bell, you know—so I sketched that in in order that I might never forget it."

"Forget the voices of the riveh speerits?" Maiton cried. "You expaict yo'd eveh fo' get 'em, havin' heard 'em wunst? Ho, law—yo's a softpaw—yo' ain' be'n long on the riveh. When 'd yo' git to come a-float?"

"Why, Wednesday—this is Friday mornin'."

"I knowed hit. This Friday! Why, sho! I lost a day—I lost Thursday. When 'd yo' pick me up?"

"Just at daybreak, yesterday morning."

"Yas, suh! I remembah. Lawse! What a neck I got—hit's stiff—sore—near broke yet! You're educated. A feller touched my neck, an' I went numb to my heels, slow-like."

"Hit you on the neck?"

"No, suh! Kind of laid his hand onto hit, an' I couldn't he'p myse'f. I kep' a goin'—a goin', gettin' number an' number! Come daylight when yo' fished me out. Les' look out."

He went on the bow deck and looked around. Toskin stood in the doorway watching him as he looked up the chute, and to the left across the main river.

"Yas, suh, I floated twenty miles, strange. Jes' floatin', lyin' on my back all paralyzed, my haid throwed back, down reach 'n' bend, down crossin' an' chute, an'—hit were here yo' drug me out? I 'membah seein' a light, an' feelin' a shanty boat hull, hookin' my finge's into the strake crack. Sho! Ol' Mississipp' brung me hyar to this bo't—a daid man's bo't! Lawse—Lawsy! Ol' Mississipp' had hit in fo' me—he shore did! Yas, suh!"

Staggering, Maiton sank into the old green wicker chair on the deck. He sat there, mumbling and nodding to the wandering of his own thoughts. On him had settled one of the Mississippi River convictions, and he whined with helpless misery and futile wish.

"Stranger—stranger"—he turned to Toskin, one hand reaching suddenly to the

back of his neck, as it creaked stiffly—"I lied, strange! I'd neveh kill yo'-all—not in Gawd's world—neveh!"

"I thought so," Toskin smiled. "Come in and we'll have a cup of coffee and breakfast—what say?"

"Yas, suh, but—that cabin. Ho, law! Do yo'-all b'lieve in ghosts?"

"Believe in ghosts?" Toskin laughed. "Why, yes—after a fashion. I'd hate a lot not to believe in them, you know. Take a real, nice, good-natured ghost, now, and he's lots of company."

"Sho, sho!" Maiton exclaimed, and then, grinning wryly, stepped lightly the length of the cabin, swinging wide from the bunk, and working in the kitchen to help make the breakfast which both of them needed.

When they had eaten they washed and dried the dishes, put them away and returned into the sitting room. As before, Maiton kept covert eye on the bunk, as though he would be ready should it rise up and fly at him. On the other hand, catching another glimpse of the picture on the easel, he shied at it, too, while Toskin regarded him with the amusement of a man who has become well rid of his own fright.

"You do not like my cabin boat?" Toskin suggested.

"Just so," Maiton admitted, sitting gingerly in the rocking chair to which his host beckoned. "I fear no man—but the devil's own—Law me!"

"The newspapers say that the dead man was a mystery—none knew his name," hinted Toskin.

"No more did I," Maiton said stoutly. "How'd I know him?"

"That is none of my business," Toskin shook his head with sudden discretion. "I believe a man should mind his own business—"

"That's more'n many a softpaw gets to know. 'Tis a wise man who knows what isn't his business. What's the idea of that damned picture?"

"I didn't want to forget how you looked lying there."

"An' I looked like a daid man—did I? White's that? What's the meaning of that sign, will you tell me that?"

"Sign? Meaning of what sign?"

"You draw my picture—and it's my daid face into hit!"

"Oh, lots of artists make their portraits dead—or wooden."

"But that thing—I'm a daid man in a daid man's bed!" Maiton's cream-colored complexion turned ash-gray. He quivered as he glared at the portrait, seeing his own profile, the gaunt, deep wrinkles of his own face, and the lifeless relaxation of his figure, right where the murdered man had lain.

As night fell the river rat was shivering with dread. Toskin could laugh at him now. At the same time he was sorry for the man, knowing full well what he was suffering. He could not help but speculate on the visitor's knowledge of the boat's tragedy, but he knew far too much by this time to give voice to hint or inquiry in the matter.

Maiton warmed slowly in the fearless poise of his host.

"You-all know a daid man slept theh—an' you're not afear'd, misteh?" Tom Maiton asked.

"I think—don't you—that I would better fear the living more?" Toskin asked in turn, with crisp meaning in his tone.

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh!" Maiton acknowledged. "Two men near laid daid on that bunk—yas, indeedy—"

"Three," Toskin added. "I was closer to dying than you were, when I lifted you on there, and fed you, warmed you with hot clothes—brought you back from almost complete exhaustion to sleep and rest."

"I know yo' did—now—yas, suh," Maiton acknowledged, shamed. "Listen."

In the darkness without they heard motors, and Maiton stepped to the bow deck to hear better.

"Hit's friends of mine," he whispered to Toskin in the darkness, and raising his voice through his megaphoned hands, he gave an "aloo-hoo" call. An answer returned from the river darkness, and a minute or two later the dark craft approached in the gloom. One of the men turned on a spotlight and sought out the little shanty boat. There was a brief interval of silence and then there was a shrill, low scream:

"Hit's the murder boat from Mendova. Hit's their ghosts. Mad Tom's an' t'other

daid man. Hard oveh! Hard oveh! Oh, Gawd! We didn't mean nothin'!"

CHAPTER VI.

DANGLING RIVER TEMPTATIONS.

DENTON RILLARD felt his grip on affairs slipping sensibly as he regarded the situation in which he now found himself. Old Mississipp' had captivated him, and he asked himself the most fatal of all questions to consider:

"Who'd know anything about it?"

His surface thoughts were innocent enough, but away down underneath was what they call a hankering for adventure—affected, considerably, by the fear of people misunderstanding him, if he happened to be caught at it. He could not quite regard the gay and questionable incidents of the big concert boat river dance with complete regret. He had kissed Dona with considerable enthusiasm, he admitted to himself, but with such an indifference that no one should object to it—even Corilla, if she would only understand it as well as he did, the surprise, unexpectedness and naturalness of it.

At the same time, thinking of the river desperado's indignant charge and his prompt and scientific bafflement and expulsion, Rillard wondered if he had killed a man? Certainly that practiced thumbing of Mad Tom's neck had crippled the river rat, and numbed men in water have little chance of escape from drowning.

The vicious jealousy of the man had been, of course, perfectly foolish; Rillard was merely a spectator, and all that, as he assured himself, but there was one deep satisfaction for him: nobody ever paid any attention to what shanty boaters did, or what happened to people down the Mississippi River. One might read a thousand newspapers and never learn anything about the Mississippi except that sometimes it had some awful floods, and sometimes it needed a hundred millions to make it navigable. Since coming below Cairo, out of the Ohio, Rillard had heard forty stories, at least, which would have made good news yarns, if any reporter had heard them, but apparent-

ly the only reports of the Mississippi were issued by waterway conventions and the Weather Bureau.

He thrilled with dismay as he thought of what a newspaper man would do with the story of Hon. Denton Rillard's feud with pirates, undertaken to save a pretty river girl from their attentions. That phase of the matter was fit to make him reel with excitement. Over and over again he reassured himself that what happened on the Mississippi was a closed book as regards up-the-bank knowledge.

Accordingly, without many misgivings, he dropped out of the eddy with the Voane boat, made fast to it down the crossing and thus saved the women on board the necessity of steering or pulling it with their sweeps; the power of his own motor would take the big house boat upstream, if need be.

Worst of all, perhaps, he assented to dining on board their boat, where the naturalness and ease with which the women acted greatly assisted him in maintaining a strictly decorous attitude of distant friendliness. There was not the least deceit on his part; when he landed at Cypress, he explained his necessity by saying that he expected letters from his wife and business associates. Neither of the women showed the least sign of surprise or feeling on learning that he was married. In fact, they had known it right along.

There was never lack for something to talk about. Mrs. Voane had lived on the Mississippi for nearly twenty years, and previous to that had been a Montana prospector's daughter, living from camp to camp, and she was now a woman of some little property, and asked Rillard's advice about investing several hundred dollars of income from mine stock dividends that happened to come to her at Memphis, where they ran down Ash Slough.

Two days later they landed in at St. Francis Towhead, near the St. Francis River mouth. A flock of wild geese came flying by. low down, and Dona stepped outside with a long-barreled thirty-eight caliber revolver. As they began to climb she threw the weapon up and fired six times. The range was from twenty yards to about

eighty yards, and four of the great birds came flopping end over end to the rippled sand. It was wonderful shooting. Rillard had never seen anything like it.

As he saw how the bullets had center-plumbed the unhappy birds, he was startled by another thought—this girl was perfectly competent to take care of herself. He turned and looked at her with some little alarm, and was just in time to see the quiet smile, and the uprolling eyes of a young woman who knew that she had amazed and shaken a man beyond any idea that he had previously expressed. She was laughing at him, and worst of all, he rather enjoyed the discovery that she was so much more capable than he had supposed possible.

Right then, however, was the ending of his legitimate guardianship—with his own discovery of its needlessness. Till that moment he could have shown a proof of indifferent gallantry to any court to which his conscience might appeal, barring perhaps Corilla herself, who would have been rather biased, in all probability. Now, stripped of any ignorance he might have pleaded, he stiffened his neck with the observation that nobody would ever know that he had accompanied two shanty boaters, widow and daughter, some two or three hundred miles down the lonely Mississippi.

Nobody—that is, except shanty boaters. Apparently, the Voanes knew about everybody down the Mississippi. They stopped in eddies, reaches, and bends. They visited fishermen's tents up the bank, commissaries over the levees, and remained three days at a logging camp, because they knew the foreman—an old friend of Voane.

Where the coon hunting was good, Dona brought out her own and her father's powerful headlights, adjusted the latter to Rillard's yachting cap, and took him out upon the wooded bottoms, to initiate him in the mysteries of fire hunting.

It was rare sport; he shot three coons in one dark corner brake above St. Francis Towhead, and when they were turned around in the cane, his wrist compass enabled them to find their way back to the river bank. He would not have missed the ~~was~~ two-year-old coon which Dona baked—not for money, anyhow.

Returning to the big shanty boat and cruiser in their little skiff, driven by an out-board motor, they found another boat floating down the midstream, with doors open and deaf to any hail. Turning their headlights on it, they saw that the bunk in the cabin was empty, and that no one was on board.

They ran alongside, dropped a line on one of the oar pinheads and swung it into the towhead eddy, and anchored it there. Going up to the young woman's boat, Rillard helped her to the stern deck, and himself sprang up lightly. They stood there in the gray darkness of 2 A.M. It was just as natural to go hunting coons at night, down the Mississippi, as hunting grouse on an afternoon from an Adirondack camp or Pennsylvania clubhouse.

"You're teaching me a lot about living down the Mississippi," he said with sudden realization.

"There's a lot to learn yet," she chuckled. "I'd better tell you—Mad Tom isn't dead. He floated down about twenty miles, and a softpaw artist from down East, somewhere, picked him up. They're all waiting for us, down by White River, or Arkansas Old Mouth, Mad Tom an' his pirate crew."

"Waiting for us?"

"Yas, suh—passed us by, and didn't know hit."

"Why—why—"

"It's fair warnin'; they're mean, that pirate crew; they'll shoot yo' if they can; I'm all right. They come round this boat, an' I'll shoot fustest an' ask questions, if necessary, afterward. But I'm powerful worried about you, suh. Likely yo'd betteh quit the riveh—the farther down yo' go, the worse off yo' be, till yo' go down Chaffelli, where yo' don't come back."

There it was again—the challenge of old Mississipp! Rillard rose on his tiptoes, almost unconsciously, and he turned to look down the river where Helena's lights were sparkling and shining nine or ten miles distant. Just that way a crisis had come to him—and he just couldn't resist the circumstances.

Returning on board his boat he tried to give the situation serious and sensible consideration. He knew there was only a di-

lemma for choice—he must stay with the river, and all its strangely fascinating attractions and dangers, or he must make haste back up-the-bank to his own country and his own people.

He hesitated, dallied with the various considerations, asked himself if a real man could, with honor, permit a gang of river desperadoes to drive him from the navigable highway. He allowed himself to remember the cunning and attractive Dona only as an interesting young river woman of a discreetly friendly type—but he knew, down in his heart, that there was, really, only one thing to do—quit!

For a minute he determined to do so, but recalled that he still had Dona's beautiful revolver, the Cheyenne belt and quick-draw holster. He could not go away with that, and it was too late to hand it aboard in passing out of the eddy, and accordingly he turned in and tossed uneasily in his little stateroom bunk long before he could sleep. But, sleeping at last, he slept late, and was only awakened when, from alongside, came the hail of Dona, telling him breakfast was ready—pork sage sausage, hot bread and pan-browned milk gravy, drip coffee and buckwheat cakes, wild honey and the like, all cooked in river fashion.

It was a quiet breakfast; the two watched him covertly, wondering what he would do, whether he would succumb to the gravity of his danger, and leave the river, or whether he would go down and confront the river wretches, taking their challenge.

He did not enlighten them. After breakfast he and Dona went to the little shanty boat which they had salvaged the previous night, as it floated lost down the mid-current. It gave evidence of another mystery. Whoever had lived on board had thrown his clothes over a chair, and gone to bed. The bed had been slept in. It was a single iron bedstead, with everything clean and neat. Cold cooked meat and raised buckwheat batter cakes were ready for breakfast; even coffee was in the percolator; hanging over the head of the bed was a money belt containing eight hundred and fifty dollars, but no name and no address. On the wall beside the pillow was a heavy army automatic, loaded, and the safety on,

showing that it was ready for instant use. In a corner were two firearms, a twenty gauge repeater and a twenty-five-thirty-five automatic rifle.

What was the answer?

Dona said:

"His lines are all coiled up, but his anchor is wet and muddy; what that man did was walk up in his sleep, hoist his anchor and then—fall overboard! Perhaps he couldn't swim, and drowned; perhaps the shock of frosty upper Mississippi water chilled and cramped him; perhaps he reached the bank, and don't know what had happened to him! Many a man walks in his sleep down this shanty boatin' riveh—and to that kind, things happen—sho! I neveh saw this boat before, and it's riveh built, twenty-two foot long, six and a half foot wide, low cabin, deep hull. Who knows what happened on hit?"

"What 'll we do with it?"

"Hit's worth, with that money, a thousand dollars; there may be more into it; we'd better search!"

They ransacked the boat from bow to stern, under decks, in the pump hole, through pockets and boxes and the trunk. The trunk, a square-cornered, iron-strapped container, contained packs of cards, all marked and new, except three; poker chips, several sets of dice, some square-cornered and some round—and as she remarked, after rolling them a few times, all were loaded or trimmed to win and lose. A dozen books, Hoyle's, draughts, chess, told of a gamester's studies. There was a book of river maps, and maps of Colorado, Arizona, Idaho and New York City's metropolitan district.

The boat itself had no gambling conveniences, merely a swing table and a small cook stove, a kitchen-galley well provided with grub, plenty of assorted ammunition for the firearms, and from end to end, not one line of writing, not a pen or pencil mark, and the markers had been ripped carefully from every garment on board. A gold watch, tied with a rawhide thong in the trousers, had the numbers scratched off case and works, but there was a picture of a girl in the hunting case face cover—and when Rillard looked at it he gasped with amazement.

"Why—Dona—it's your picture!" he cried.

"What!" she exclaimed, and examined the picture. It was a profile, taken with a small camera, showing her from her trim waist to her head, with a background of river bank out of focus.

"Why, I never saw that picture before!" she cried, and her mother verified her statement: neither one could remember when it was taken, but there was a corner of a cabin visible just beyond her and behind her. Studying this, they determined at last that the picture had been taken on board a shanty boat on the Yellowstone River about two years previous, but it was a local boat, on skids up the bank, and belonged to a trapper and his wife. Other people had been around there, but not this derelict boat.

"Some gambler—and he came down Missouri into old Mississipp'," Dona mused. "I hadn't heard of him—to know him."

Thinking the man might come down during the next day or two, looking for his boat, they waited several days, and then they read in a Memphis newspaper that a man had been found drowned on President Island Towhead. He was dressed in a nightgown only, and there was no clew to his identity, except that he was five feet eight inches tall, weighed about one hundred and sixty-five pounds, had dark hair, brown eyes and dark complexion, with a brown mustache.

"Findings is keepings, then!" Dona remarked, wryly, and they divided the money, splitting it three ways; Rillard took the watch, a beautiful instrument that must have cost upward of two hundred dollars, and the two women took the boat and its contents, as fair an exchange as could be made, for it would, on sale, sell for about as much as the watch.

At Helena they sold the boat for one hundred and sixty dollars cash, with everything on board, except the firearms and ammunition. Thus closed a river incident with the marks of a typical Mississippi grimness. But the inside of the watch cover gave to Rillard a new slant on the river ways. He had not thought of possessing a picture of Dona Voane. The picture, however, caught

and held his attention, and as he tripped down the current with his motor boat alongside the long house boat, he looked at the picture so much that he forgot that he was responsible for the safe guidance of the two craft—and a sudden cry brought him back to his senses, just too late!

They were floating down the long Red Town Bend when the current swung them whirling into the caving bank, and there a huge sawyer, jumping with all the power of a log in a white-water cascade, came up beneath the big house boat, struck the bottom with the force of an explosion and smashed it up, tore up through the stringers and the cabin floor and a long, jagged root pierced the very roof itself.

Just that way things happen down the Mississippi; a little day dreaming, a bit of neglect, a moment of delicious peace and lovely floating is changed into one of tragedy, or dire peril. No sooner had the sawyer, a tree snag more than a hundred feet long, sprang up through the house boat than it swung down again, tearing out the floor and bottom for fifteen or twenty feet and disappearing in the water depths before the flood fairly poured into the hull and cabin.

Mrs. Voane had been sitting in the cabin, peeling potatoes. She was not seen after her daughter turned to cover the bottom of a frying pan with squirrel meat. At the crash, Dona saw the snag clutching at her, but threw herself to the stern, and with a scream, sprang to the deck of the Jungle, Rillard's motor boat. Then seeing the house boat sinking, she cast off the line that held the Jungle's stern, and bounded forward and cast off the bow line before Rillard had moved in his paralysis of astounded horror.

The motor boat swung clear, bow upstream, and the house boat sank into the depths. A few splintered boards, a little section of the roof, a few bits of stove wood floated up out of the water, but that was all. The heavy kitchen range, the big cabin heater, the anchors, traps, and perhaps a ton or two of junk distributed around the shanty boat sank it to the bottom, perhaps in a hundred feet of water.

Dona fainted on the motor boat cabin.

Rillard stumbled over it to her side, and crying in his remorse at the penalty of his carelessness, stooped over her and tried to revive her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVER DOES TO MEN.

TWO days after becoming acquainted with one another Toskin and Maiton landed in the Free Bend eddy and convinced Jim Taken and Date Imsal that neither was a ghost, and that the murder boat was harmless, as yet, at least. Nevertheless, none of the river pirates would venture on board the craft, and were for a time doubtful about welcoming Maiton and Toskin on their own shaggy, questionable and faded launches and shanties.

Shortly they were going over the affairs of the river, and Maiton heard that Rillard was coming down with the Voanes. The fact made him snarl with anger; an up-the-bank softpaw had fouled him! That was his viewpoint, and he promised to shoot the man on sight—no boast, but a promise!

To make sure he began to shoot often with a revolver and an automatic, taking marks as they came in lonely bends and over sand bars. He had long practiced with firearms, and he remarked on the value of practice as exemplified by the work of Dona Voane with her weapons. Dona had shown her skill often enough for the river people to know that she could, if she dared, shoot with accurate menace.

"Shucks!" Maiton had said to the evidence of his own eyes. "She'd neveh shoot a man—a woman 'd be afeared to shoot a man. Dona shoot me? Not in a thousand years!"

Jim Taken ventured to offer a tentative warning against his easy confidence in his belief. To this Mad Tom made angry retort, and the pal subsided. They all talked freely before Toskin, and having learned what he was down the Mississippi to do, they took delight in having him draw sketches of them; some posed, and many as natural and easy as their habit at the steering wheel or sweep of a launch or scow.

There they were, six as bad and mean

rascals as the river afforded, taking him in with them, knowing that he was honest—but a good fellow; glad to accommodate him with their looks and gestures, willing that he should sketch them when they knew it or not. One thing they emphatically refused, however, was to let him take their photographs. He could sketch them, in detail and all together, as they were, leaning over their tables in thieving scheme or debonair in wild fowl hunting—but they shied from photographs, which would serve to advertise their characteristics should any detective or police force know the need of capturing them.

But they enjoyed the photographs he took of other shanty boats, of other river people, of detail and general river scenery, snag, sand bar or lumping bank. In his river studies he found the river rats of irreplaceable value as advisers, for they showed him the niceties of river features, the white streak of a fisherman's new jump line on a snag, the oar pinheads of shanty boats, the service of a long handy line in throwing Young's big storeboat out of the main current into an eddy, the old-fashioned stern oar, the pretty work of a tripper who used an outboard motor to drive his shanty boat from the dead water of an eddy out into the running channel. Every one of these suggestions which they made rang true with the completeness of their piratical river knowledge, and Toskin ended each day with his questionable friends, a dead-tired man, but with his brain full of data which his subconsciousness, working all night, had hardly time to sort, file away and tabulate for future reference.

For one thing, he trusted to his eyes and ears, not his tongue, to satisfy his curiosity. If he spoke it was never with a question on his lips—he talked of all affairs but those of his associates. For this reason, as well as for his remarkable indifference to spectral possibilities in his shanty boat, he was welcome to the men about him. He quite won the hearts of the two terrible women who cared for the piratical craft, the cooking and cleaning and often the navigating, while the men attended to their sundry affairs.

It seemed to Toskin that he had never in his life seen such female humans. Their

faces had lost all trace of sex, and were wrinkled, fixed of expression and sullen of countenance; when they spoke it was with the vibrant tang of frogs, low, grunting and ventriloquial. Finding Toskin a willing listener, they told him, when the men were not near, stories of their own lives on the rivers, from above Pittsburgh to Fort Benton, from Shreveport to away up the Yazoo, from down Chaffelli to the dark corners of the Arkansaw and St. Francis.

He sketched them, to their delight, for somehow he was able to give their hard, sullen faces a certain expression the source of which he did not know himself. His pencil, chalk, and even his oils laid over the sketched outlines on a canvas, all displayed that something which he studied to learn its meaning—and one day when he sketched a snag from a photograph which he had taken, he saw a likeness, a vanishing line of ripple below the snag that trailed away in an odd, convoluting, twisting incurving. It was like the long, pitifully thin rat tail of braided hair down the back of Comanche, as one of the women was called.

With that startling hint Toskin made studies of the women with his little vest-pocket camera, risking their wrath if they should discover his efforts, but knowing that none of them, save Mad Tom, would visit his own boat because of the murder on it.

And thus Toskin, with a reading glass, ransacked the profiles and full faces of the women, till he knew that their faces were not, as he had at first supposed, devoid of all but sullen expression; they were crinkled and wrinkled, sun-tanned and wind-creased, squinted by bright light and dark night tripping, and curved with an odd humor, toughened by an age of indifference to all pangs but those of chill and hunger. He marveled at what he was discovering, and taking one of the profiles, that of Caprice—what a name!—he patiently plucked out of sketch and photograph tiny and nearly hidden lines and flickers of faintest expression, putting them on a card with water colors.

Working with tiny details, bent only on catching those elusive lines, and areas so small that on the camera prints they were nearly microscopic in size, he hardly noticed

what result *in toto* he was obtaining. Then, happening to look at the portrait from a little distance, all the fine touches and tiny copied strokes blended into one, and he stood amazed by the thing that he had done—the portrait of a young, beautiful and wise—far too knowing!—young woman.

"Why, gracious!" he cried to himself. "What have I done?"

That was Caprice—a woman of one name, a pirate drudge and a bent-down river woman. He sat back and looked at the portrait for an hour. It was this that his artistic second sight had seen, and compelled him by minute and painful toil to steal from all his collection of note pictures and sketch lines. He wondered if his eyes had played him false? He could hardly believe that any such person was mingled with all the other characters in that old and squodgy woman.

Without comment he held it up in a little drift pile wood frame, and the pirates and women looked at it from their dinner table, to which he was late in coming. For a minute they gazed, and then a ribald grin stole across the features of Mad Tom; Jim Taken shrugged his shoulders and made a sneering remark; Comanche straightened up and uttered a cry of astonished recognition: "Why, Caprice—"

Caprice stood half erect and leaned, with heavy-jowled face to see with eyes growing a bit dim, stared for a full minute up and down and across that picture; as she scrutinized it, her face softened, and the blank toughness seemed to recede, leaving a better rounded face.

"Sho, sho!" she said, and then throwing up her hands, turned and waddled down the cabin and into the narrow little stateroom of the main craft of the little pirate fleet, bellowing aloud with an emphasis that must have been comic, had it not been the wail of a heartbroken old hag who had recognized a picture of the girl that she had once been.

Toskin, as long as he lived, would remember that woman's sudden realization of her life. At the same time he could never again look into a human countenance without divining from its hidden lines of spiritual growth, or moral decay, secrets that must

disturb his own satisfaction in human companionship; for old Mississipp' had lavished on him a faculty, a power and a curse of understanding, the inspiration of discovering the endurance of humanity through trifling with virtue and taking as serious the minor things of life.

Mad Tom, next of Toskin's studies, displayed another phase. Caprice had been willful, and had chosen that name in the days when it meant something besides a river past. Mad Tom, little by little, gave to Toskin the more pitiful fact of his physical weakness, his mental lack of balance, his heart always sore with disappointment because nature had given him a bit of pride in looking well—and he was a horrid little wretch. In his desperation and indignation against his own fate, he had stormed off down the Mississippi, become crook, criminal, scoundrel and brute creator of wretched violence.

Toskin knew better than to show him, or any² of his, the picture that revealed the hopeful and unconscious youth—too weak, too ignorant, too mean-souled, too contemptible ever to become anything remarkable to gratify his pride, yet always enduring the wish and crumbling under the desire, a homely little nobody with an appetite for bigger things. And Tom Maiton had raged and strived and grown reckless—and down old Mississipp' he had found a leadership among the miserable of his own type, and gained a notoriety that helped him evade the pain of his lack of fame. A good little boy, a true youth, a cringing, brow-beaten little man—till that day he fell upon a bigger, handsome, fine-favored youth and cut his heart out, because of a girl's sneer and cruel contempt. The analytical portrait and the old women's gossip gave Toskin the truth—to use when he should, if ever, be permitted to paint his way with inspired discoveries.

But as he discovered his new powers, Toskin felt in his soul the terrible dread that he should never be able to draw what he saw with his mind's eye; cultured critics could never overcome their repugnance against the crude color and the careless sweep of his brush—that fear smote him, and Toskin spent a sleepless night of fore-

boding, wretched because probably by the time he was through with his best work, he would still be one of the host and horde of—say, the undiscovered, disillusioned and disappointed.

Really, he was never so confident as when he was asking himself the question of whether his life was worth living or not. He was among low and degraded people; he was living in a kind of squalor amid a darkness of moral obloquy. He listened, without a qualm, to schemes of robbing commissaries—stores—up the bank; he heard Mad Tom tell about a bank he knew, with millions in its vaults, guarded by a lock that would succumb to a little soup, if only the night marshal could be rendered helpless. Really, too, Toskin was *particeps criminis*, to the extent that he ate delicious beef, pork, chickens, and a dozen vegetable products. He knew the animals were killed in the brakes, the chickens snatched from their roosts, the vegetables filched—and yet he ate with good appetite!

"What's the river doing to me?" he wondered.

Old Mississipp' was doing to him apace, and opening the channel wide for undreamable things! A nice, innocent, ambitious and competent artist with some few refined and cultured feelings left, despite his several weeks down old Mississipp', he sat in the river pirate council, pencil and sketch pad in hand, hardly conscious of what his ears recorded, he was so engrossed in fixing with lead the flashes and contortions of the faces before him.

Mad Tom had picked up a bit of news. He was indignant clear through. His weeks of talk had been to cheer his own sadness, but now he was desperate.

"Dona Voane's drappin' down the Mississippi with Dent Rillard!" Mad Tom said. "The Voane boat's tore up, they claim; Mrs. Voane's done drowned—an', boys, Rillard can't marry that gal! No, sub! He's a scoundrel hisse'f! They didn't stop—he ain't got no seventeen dollars 'n' fifty cent 'vorce, an' that gal's—gal's—boys! I lost my fustest gal, 'count of a handsome city-bred scoundrel, an' I cut his heart out! Dona'd married me, if he hadn't come along. You know how 'tis?"

His voice broke into a whine, the shrill, shivering, whistling whine of a whipped man of the world, one conscious of his own inferiority in every way, and mad with anger because he had nothing in him with which to build up a personal competence in physical equality—what he might have done, carefully trained, given a real, rather than a common school education, none need try to surmise, Toskin reflected.

"I'm goin' to kill that scoundrel Rillard! He caught me foul, an' s'prised me wunst!" Mad Tom said, hoarsely. "Now hit's my turn—wunst for all! *Wunst for all!*"

His turn at last—time for him to stand up, with his weapons against another man with his, and exercising the guile and beguilements available to an undersized, crooked and stunted river rat.

Toskin, knowing only river rats on the river, speculated on this projected crime of murder to recover a woman. Somehow, the talk that must have amazed and alarmed him in any of his old haunts back home seemed here to be perfectly natural—and certainly none of his business—till he was asleep alone on his own boat, Mad Tom having joined his river pals on theirs.

Then he saw himself in the light of his old standards of morality, justice and standard laws. And when, the following day, lurking hidden in the brush of Half Moon Lake Island, he saw the Jungle, Denton Rillard's boat, go floating down, and heard Mad Tom chortling with angry delight at the near prospect of doing murder, he thought that he could not permit this crime. He must, in some way, prevent it, and when, after dark, the pirates and he went floating downstream looking for the sport's landing in eddy or against bank, he planned to give Rillard fair warning.

Somehow, in the river gloom, spurts of current separated the little fleet, or perhaps the pirates just decided to be shut of their softpaw associates for the time being. Toskin was carried down close to a caving bank, fought the current, and was suddenly swirled into an eddy only a rod wide and three or four rods long. He threw a line over a caved-down snag, deciding to wait for morning before venturing out into the swift, sawing current.

He turned in to sleep the rest of the night. He was awakened by the hail of a huntress in the morning; she had been hunting, for she carried a wild gobbler.

"Howdy, on board, theh?" she hailed.

Looking out he saw a very comely, a very attractive young woman looking down at him.

"Did yo' see Mad Tom, or hisn's fleet lately?"

"Why, they went down last night—I lost them—"

"Lost you? Oh, yes. You're that painting and drawing fellow. I heard tell of you—yes. You say they went on down?"

"Yes—"

"How far?"

"Why, all night, unless they found—um-m—"

"Oh, thank you! I know—you're a softpaw. Better let me help you out of this eddy with your boat—you might be tore up on some snags, just below. I lost my boat—and my mother"—she choked a little—"in a bend like this."

She came down, cast off the lines and took the sweeps, and Toskin, from in the cabin with his camera, stole picture after picture of this lithe and splendid figure as she swung the little shanty boat out into the current and with beautiful strokes carried it clear of the eddy edges and the swishing, pounding sawyers of trees that had caved off the wooded bank along that bend.

She took him down into Montgomery Chute, and around the bend, by Arkansaw New Mouth, where the Arkansaw flows with the waters of White River, landed him alongside the Jungle.

"Mr. Rillard!" she called. "Here is Mr. Toskin, the artist that's been with Mad Tom's pirates. They're looking for us, just as we've heard. They'll do murder—Mad Tom will. I cain't let yo'-all be killed on my account!"

Rillard stood in the engine pit of his cruiser and looked at Toskin with the tall, handsome, self-confident aloofness of a successful business man who is contemplating a dreaming genius.

"So you are Mr. Toskin?" Rillard smiled. "Haven't I heard of you—somewhere?"

"Yes, sir; I think perhaps, yes, sir—" Toskin hesitated. "You see—partly—you helped pay for my art course!"

"Eh—what? How was that? Oh, um-m—"

"Advertisements for your products—"

"That's so—I've been wondering; well—well, the world is small, isn't it? Um-m—yes!"

Rillard gave an alarmed glance in the direction of Dona Voane, and then an equally sidelong glance at Toskin—a glance the artist treasured long afterward, though at the moment he was far from pleased, and was asking himself a number of questions without showing his thoughts in his blank expression.

"Miss Voane's boat was sunk by a sawyer just below Helena," Rillard said, by way of explaining. "Her mother lost her life and she escaped by a very narrow margin. It was my fault. I was a fool—"

As he looked across the river, biting his lower lip, Toskin saw that Dona regarded him with an expression of utter contempt, though she veiled her expression on the instant. Whatever might be in Rillard's mind, Dona utterly despised him, and Toskin wondered at the exultant leap in his own heart that this was true.

"That's the murder boat, isn't it?" Dona inquired. "Seen any ghosts?"

Toskin admitted his night of panic, and described the coming of Mad Tom, like a water-logged spirit out of the river eddy. Dona smiled, and Rillard nodded with satisfaction.

"One of Colonel Sibley's people said you were up there and probably couldn't get out," Dona explained as they all three ate breakfast together on the motor boat. "And we wanted to know about Mad Tom; he's been talking all the way down about killing Mr. Rillard, here."

"Probably he'll stop in at the mouth of old Arkansaw," Toskin suggested. "He said you'd always stop there a while, Miss Voane."

"Not this trip. I'm going to Arkansaw City. I've friends in the eddy, there, and money 'll come from—from our property. Mother and I held it in joint accounts, so if one—one passed out—the other could draw

it. You never know what 'll happen on old Mississipp'!"

"You can take my boat," Toskin suggested in an aside, wondering at his prescience; "I'll wait at Arkansaw City."

"Lawsy—white man!" she whispered. "How'd you know what was in my heart?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY WALK IN RIVER NIGHT.

DONA VOANE went afloat in the murder boat. Toskin remained on the Jungle. Rillard watched her departure with eyes whose light changed to darkness, and Dona hardly glanced at him at all. She held the beautifully balanced sweeps of the little shanty boat, dropping down White River current into the Mississippi, her thoughts entirely on Toskin, who had loaned her his boat.

That had been such an honorable thing to do! It showed his fine feeling, his understanding of the predicament that had compelled her to float down the river with the bungling and proud-thoughted Rillard. Rillard had said many things that made Dona despise him more and more.

He had been glad that the river people were so isolated, and she had found some amusement in his confidence that his river experience was so sure to be buried in the oblivion of river tradition. The river, she knew, would protect its own, but when some sport tripped down, and sought to take advantage of the river's characteristics—well, old Mississipp' would change them for the occasion.

Toskin, however, was different. He fitted in. She could see why the pirates had trusted him—he was gifted with tact, and the river etiquette just naturally laid its law down for him, and he obeyed. Who but a natural-born river man would have instantly offered her his own shanty boat to relieve her of the equivocal position she seemed to occupy, floating down in the four state-roomed, large-cabined, well-found Jungle?

She made her escape from that predicament immediately, and dropped down to Mozart Bend, to land in for the night with

her old friend, Mrs. Forbes, who owned the great horseshoe of river, holding it against all comers, and five of whose seven husbands were buried up the bank, all in a row. Mrs. Forbes came down running, but as she stared at the shanty boat she drew nervously back.

"What boat's that? What boat's that, Dona?" she cried in a shrill voice.

"A man name of Toskin lent me hit, account of ourn tearin' up—mother's daid!"

"So I hearn—po'r gall Lawsy! How come hit?"

"Hit were a fool scoundrel, a sport name of Rillard! He was sittin' into his boat pilot house, the Jungle—we drapped down Red Town Bend—an' yo' know what 'tis, the sawyers an' snags along that cavin' bank. Down we drapped—up a sawyer jumped. Lawsy—Lawsy!"

Dona sobbed, and the little, red-haired river woman put her arm around the disconsolate girl. They went up to Mrs. Forbes's small red shanty boat on its skids, and Dona finished her narrative.

"I jumped to the Jungle—threwed off the line, or hit 'd be'n pulled oveh, too! He, the fool, stood theh, jaw-drapped an' wide-eyed! Theh I was—a lonely bend—no boat of mine! On hisn's boat. I could have jumped in, but—shucks—hit had four staterooms, an' I had one, 'sides my thirty-two automatic I always wear. We kept a trippin' down. 'Course theh's a lot of talk—"

"I hearn hit. The newspapers has stories about hit—"

"An' that fool 'lowed nobody'd know but shanty boaters! He's always 'fraid he'd be found out—no idea but as to him. 'Course I didn't count, not to hisn mind! We drapped into Montgomery Chute, an' Mad Tom's landed into Arkansaw Old Mouth, but he didn't get to see me. I come by late an' dusky. Hyar I be, Mother Forbes!"

"An' glad I am yo' come. But that boat, missy! Lawsy! Yo' don't sleep into hit?"

"I'm not afeared to; theh's a picture drawin' an' photographin' fellow drapped down into hit—"

"Yo' took hit?"

"When he banded hit to me, sayin' I was

welcome! Shucks—I'd took a pizen rattlesnake from him—"

"Sho!" Mrs. Forbes exclaimed, and Dona blushed as she realized the significance of what she had said.

"Hit were jes' friendly, so's I needn't to stay on the Jungle any more. I took hit—at Arkansaw City, of course, I kin draw money, an' outfit again—"

Despite Mrs. Forbes's objections, Dona went down on board the boat to sleep that night. It was a late hour, for Mrs. Forbes and she had had many things to talk over. Going up the pretty plank gangway, serving as a spar to hold the bow off the bank, she hauled taut the port bow line, which was slack, and felt the stern line and found it run out in good water in the eddy. Entering the cabin, she locked both doors and sat down in the lamp light and felt the loneliness of her life now.

Her mother had gone utterly out of her life, like the light of a candle. She was alone in the world, but self-reliant. That wasn't it. The companionship had been sufficient. They had enjoyed the river living; they had braved its jeopardies, and they had lived on after her father had mysteriously disappeared, as men do. She was sure he was dead, and she suspected it had been murder done by Mad Tom or his pirates, to force her to be his wife. Then Rillard's unpardonable negligence had bereaved her. In her heart she hated him, almost equal to her hate for Mad Tom.

Now Toskin loomed in her young, free mind. He had brought, first of all, understanding to the river. Knowing the murder boat for what it was, he had dared it with true courage—a thousand miles of river was talking about Toskin's "wrestling with the spirits."

In the quiet, in the gloom, she heard them now; they were walking, this night; Rillard, fool up-the-banker that he was, had heard them in his mean way, and they had inspired him to his—she laughed—silly kiss, with its prompt punishment by the coming of Mad Tom. Real, permissible kisses aren't interrupted down old Mississipp'. Her chuckle faded into a vague and irresistible regret.

Old Mississipp' had never permitted her to

have a real lover, one who was respectable. She was quite willing, but none had come along. Toskin had befriended her; thinking of him, she listened to the river, and heard the murmuring of the ripples and the undertone of the mighty flood.

Listening, she began to hear other sounds, not meant for her ears. She heard voices and knew them to be the marching host that so often parades up and down the mid-current, a motley throng, and among them in her mind's ears, she heard a familiar voice.

Trembling, reluctant, unable to resist the impulse, she put out the light and opened wide the window curtain, pulled aside the slide window and looked over the stern at the sweep of the river horseshe bend. It was a grand night scene—a few of the brighter stars shone faintly through the thick air, and the river surface, from shore to shore, was glowing with rippling radiance.

There the girl's true eyes saw the host, as never before; she saw the throng of spectral people strolling up and down, some in their quaint old customs, some in Indian raiment, some recent and not yet old-fashioned. She saw among them, as plainly as though she were but a hundred yards distance, her mother.

"I don't believe it! I don't believe it!" Dona whispered to herself. "Oh—mother—is it you?"

The figure stopped and turned to look. It was Mrs. Voane. She was a beautiful woman; her eyes were full of luster, and they were seeing eyes; she gave Dona a perfectly eloquent look, turned and saw some one coming through the throng, and walked to meet him.

It was her father. Voane was dead. He was coming, crowding his way through the press of people, but careful of the little children who played—children of Indians, of French, of Spanish, of pioneers, of shanty boat, ark, steamboat people—in his way. He came to her mother, and the two embraced; for an instant Dona was hurt and bewildered—then the two turned and looked at her. For a long time they looked across that eddy and the daughter read in their eyes the things they were thinking; they were loving her—they were smiling at

her with understanding—they were infinitely kind and comprehending.

They stood there while the others walked up and down beyond them. One of the strollers came swaggering along, and Dona recognized him as he came to her parents. He was a handsome, youngish kind of man—bold and laughing in his careless way; now she saw him look at her, his eyes twinkling—and as he pointed to her and the boat, she shivered with apprehension, which quickly ceased, however.

She was on board his boat—Clell Wilmonds's boat. He was the man who had built it, owned it, tripped the river in it, and been murdered in it. The three talked together, and after a time, each looking at her in their own ways, they strolled together into the throng, and, eddying in it, visible for a long time as they went on and on, greeting old acquaintances and strange people, they at last passed out of sight.

Then the shades glimmered and grew indistinct. There was something to be seen, and Dona strained her eyes trying to see more distinctly. But the spectral procession mingled and melted away. The river was vacant from shore to shore. She saw the trees on yon side, and the sand bar point; she saw the sand bar up the river, the crossing down the river.

She heard birds singing, and started up with astonishment. Over the trees, across the river, to the east were rays of sunshine, and the twigs of the forest gleamed and shone with reflections on the dew. It was dawn—daybreak had come apace!

Dona started to her feet, tears of gratitude flowing down her cheeks. No one in the up-the-bank world would ever believe that she had seen what had passed before her eyes; least of all would they believe that her father and mother had been united in that vast throng before her very eyes; but in her heart was such comfort as she had not known since that long wait for the return of her father had begun.

She knew he was dead; her mother was dead; she alone remained of the Voanes. She was surprised to find in her hand a banjo which she had not seen—she was picking it, picking it gayly, and the music was what had started the birds a-singing.

"Why, it's my banjo what was stoled!" she gasped.

"Dona! Dona Voane!" a shrill voice hailed down the river bank. "My Lawse! I 'lowed yo'd gone plumb crazy!"

It was Mrs. Forbes. Mrs. Forbes added the rest to the story of that night:

"Gal—gal, hit's yo' makin' that music? I hearn hit an' I hearn hit—why, I 'lowed hit were the ghostes a-walkin'! I was plumb scairt—po'r gal! Was yo' that lonesome, yo' played yo' banjo all night? Hit's sweet, an' I—I was scairt. Yo' wouldn't b'lieve me, but I was jes' shore I could see 'em walkin'. Sometimes, when I had a husband die or git killed up I'd see 'em. But, shucks! Hit's jes' dreamin'! I don't b'lieve in haunts an' them sperits comin' back, a-tormentin' folks, do you? If yo' kill a man he don't come a-hauntin' back, does he, gal?"

"I don't think so. Probably he's glad to be gone." Dona smiled, and the river woman cackled and chuckled with relief.

"Why," she said, "I'd 'a' bet yo' was jes' sufferin', plumb worried an' sorrowin' to death, 'ceptin' the banjo music. Yo' had that banjo when yo' drapped down three years ago. I neveh hearn such music, then; but last night—why, gal, purty as yo' be, playin' like that! I bet—I bet yo'd git to be a show-boat gal—an' they'd have yo' on the stage, to Memphis er N'Orleans. I went to a show to N'Orleans one time I was honeymoonin' down. They sung, they danced, they played; but, gal, if they was handsome, yo'd look down on 'em all! Lawse! Seems like yo' grown a heap purtier sincet jes' last night! Yo' was tired, then. Now yo's rested. Don't yo' worry—don't yo' wear yo'se'f out! Be ready when yo' meet yo' man to be purtier'n a blue-jay er an oriole!"

"Oh, I shall!" Dona laughed lightly, and picked a dozen bars on the great banjo.

Then she went up to eat breakfast with Mrs. Forbes.

"You wouldn't b'lieve what I've seen out theh!" Mrs. Forbes said in awe.

"You good dear!" Dona exclaimed. "I'm a river girl; I'd believe anything you ever told me about it."

Mrs. Forbes laughed, but her eyes were

charged with awe as she looked out across old Mississipp', sparkling and dancing in the sunshine as the flood poured along. After breakfast Dona drifted away down the river toward Arkansaw City.

She experienced little difficulty in assuming charge of her own affairs. The joint ownership which she and her mother had taken of the property permitted her to draw checks, buy or sell, and control the fortune. This done, she tripped away down the river, her heart singing, and keeping tune to it with her banjo and her voice.

She was happy; she was sure; she trusted herself to old Mississipp' like a babe trusts itself to its mother; also, she kept her pistol loaded and practiced with the guns that Toskin had left on board.

She waited now to see what old Mississipp' would do next—and she laughed to the river's smile, happy in her brave heart and rejoicing in her knowledge.

"What's a-comin'?" she asked. "Just a singsong to dance to!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRAVEN LURKS.

MAD TOM and his fellows in their dull-shaded pirate craft floated down Scrub Grass Bend, and as the river current carried them wandering, a touch of a sweep enabled them to lose Toskin, the pleasant up-the-banker, in the gray gloom. They wanted no casual witnesses now. Passing Montgomery Chute they debated whether or not Rillard would run up into White River and through Arkansaw New Mouth by the cut off.

"He wouldn't," Mad Tom declared. "Softpaws don't play no riveh tricks like that. Besides, I don't expect Dona 'd stand fo' hit."

Accordingly, they dropped on down toward Old Mouth, where they would find people of whom to make discreet or confidential inquiries. Mad Tom was snarling with anger against Rillard. Dona Voane would stand no nonsense from any man, but probably Rillard knew that. He must know it. She hadn't killed him, so it stood to reason he was plumb sensible.

"Likely he'll get one of them seventeen dollar 'n' fifty cent 'vorses," Mad Tom whined to himself, "an' prob'ly, account of him being a big feller, an' rich, an' respectable, an' all them kind of things, she'll marry 'im. Dona always did set a heap of store by men bein' decent. Ain't women the limit?"

Memory of his attack on Rillard was sunk deep in Mad Tom's consciousness. He was afraid, a fact that steadily made him cringe while he hated. The back of his neck still twitched and hurt where the big man's thumbing had so carelessly half paralyzed the river rat while hoisting him over the stern bumper of the concert boat, to toss him like a mongrel dog into the gray midnight eddy.

The ease with which the strong and competent man had done it was a dead weight of dread on the river rat's heart. Even thought of trickery from bushwhacking advantage made him tremble at the chance of a trip-up. The river rat shuddered as he realized that the man he hated, through sheer competence, would have an even chance against any kind of treachery. Courage walks with justified pride on a broad highway along the double barriers of hidden, skulking cravens, and each coward knows the confidence is with reason, warranted by the difference between a good man and a mean scoundrel.

Mad Tom feared the outcome, yet he pursued his intention. The pirates ran down the bank, slicked their way into Old River Mouth in a night mist, and, like cats, took their landings, separated by time and space, that chance observers might not know they had any interests in common. Thus they appeared among the dwellers of the shanty boat community, listening to what people said about one another.

Jim Taken heard all about Mad Tom's coming down the river, trying to court Dona Voane. Every one was talking about it. He passed the word to Mad Tom, who snarled at the exposure of his real feelings like a worm on a concrete sidewalk in the sun. The Jungle, Rillard's motor boat, did not appear. Mad Tom was perturbed. The powerful craft could easily turn to stem the current back to Helena, or Memphis.

"I'd ought 'a' thought of that!" he swore.

Then a fisherman who had been to Arkansas City brought up word that he had met Dona Voane dropping down in the Mendova murder boat.

"She was smilin'-happy!" the fisherman declared to Mad Tom's sharp questioning. "Singing an' playin' her banjo—"

"Anybody with her on that boat?"

"I didn't get to see." The fisherman shook his head nervously.

"Why the blazes didn't yo' look?" Mad Tom cursed him. "You blamed fool—"

"I—I was afeared!" the fisherman replied. "That gal don' stan' no nonsense from any man!"

Mad Tom threw himself in his temper, and scurried away. He rounded up his pals, and over the table in his boat told them what had taken place.

"Why, hit's that Toskin picture feller! That scoundrel ain't reliable; he's treach'rous, he is! Look't how he come hit onto we uns! He jes' drapped out that night an' foun' her, an' now—now—"

Mad Tom frothed as he thought what was the natural sequence of events.

"Hit weren't Rillard," Mad Tom declared. "Dona jes'—jes' were took, stoled likely, by that smooth-actin' picture feller! An' I neveh s'pected 'im at all! Lawse—them still fellers—I tell you, the on'y way to do, 'gin yo' meet a still feller is plug 'im! Yas, suh!"

Mad Tom cut loose and went on down the river. Dona, on Toskin's boat, was below somewhere. On the instant, thought of Rillard's fine motor boat dropped from the anxious pirate's mind. Comanche and Caprice took no part in the proceedings. They merely served the grub, cleaned the boats, and by grunts or snickers indicated their understanding of what they were told to do.

At Arkansas City they landed in one boat away up at the head of the three-mile eddy; the other, cruising down the edge of the channel current, swung in at the foot of the eddy and ran over to make fast to the great log raft which was spiled and anchored there for the sawmills. Mad Tom cast his scowling gaze across the fleet of anchored and moored shanty and motor boats

in the landing, but the Mendova murder boat was not there.

In five minutes, from the Cunis photograph boat, he learned that she had laid in the eddy two nights while the girl transacted business up the bank. Then she had swung clear again and dropped down the river. She was alone.

Never in his life had Mad Tom had so amazing and relieving a reversal of ideas. Dona Voane had come all clear and honorable. She was shut of the motor boat up-the-banker and of that picture-making, harmless kid. He took the photographer's word, laughed, and both boats soon swung away down the river full tilt.

"All I ask now is meetin' Dona face to face, fair an' square, down some lonesome bend!" Mad Tom laughed. "Hi-i! I bet she'll marry me plumb grateful—"

It was time to celebrate. He knew now that old Mississip' was meaning right by him. What more would a man ask? Certainly a river pirate asks no better friend than the river, with its night, its dark bends, its fogs and its byways. Mad Tom ran into 'Go-Lang Island Chute, where Bisko's still-boat did an all-river trade, and Bisko readily sold the pirates four jugs right out of the ground, where they had been buried better than two months. It was moonshine of tremendous proof. In their anxieties and scurrying, the pirates had missed many opportunities to liquor up. Now, with everything propitious, they opened a jugful, the aroma of which killed a fly that incautiously alighted on the top, with the cork out.

They served the river-drip in water glasses. Yet, after a round, Mad Tom called a halt.

"Hold on!" he ordered. "Likely we better go easy!"

It was river instinct, for as he turned to look up the river, they saw a motor boat coming down. It drove past nearly half a mile distant, and Mad Tom recognized it at a mile easily. The Jungle had run by, with whatever that might portend. The pirate suitor of Dona Voane went into a rage. He cursed his own companions, blaming them for the stop at Bisko's river tiger, though he had himself proposed it. Now, his advantage lost, he made haste to over-

take the girl again." Thus his confidence and dejection had all his life alternated, with senseless bursts of anger at each change of mind.

"You fools!" he cursed his people, and piling into his own open launch, with spray hood up, and his own bits of property, he deserted them all without explanation or good-by. This was his mood. He would, they surmised, show up again somewhere along the line when he needed them. He had taken one of the jugs, and as he drove at full speed, he took sip by sip, claiming to stand it when he drank it sensibly as well as any man.

He ran into the shanty boat colony on the bank at Greenville. He soon knew all he wanted to know, all there was to know. Dona had tripped past, plowing right along down with an outboard motor over the stern of the Mendova boat. The Jungle was two days behind her, and a night ahead of Mad Tom, who was dazed by the fact of the outboard motor on the shanty boat. She could beat the current in that well-shaped craft by three to five miles an hour. The Jungle was a swifter craft by far than his own launch. If the sports went night and day he was hopelessly lost astern, but knowing sports, he suspected they wouldn't run nights, being afraid of the dark in that river of questionable shadows.

Thinking it over, he knew what Dona Voane was now doing. The death of her mother made it imperative that she clear up the questions of the property, the amount of which he could only guess. The fortune was considerable, dating back through years of river saving and river trade. Those Voane women always had known how to take care of what they owned, a fact that in no way detracted from Doana's charm.

Fortune favored him well, as he supposed. A brisk south wind sprang up, tossing waves against the current and throwing his launch about. The shanty boat could make no headway against that storm. No river woman would want to ride in such a gale, and as he kept on plowing down, driving in the current, in long, lonely and wild Lake Providence Reach he saw across a sand bar the familiar outline of the Mendova boat.

It was in Two-Way Chute, and just outside anchored in deep water was the Jungle.

Mad Tom cursed as he laughed, and swung wide to land at the head of Willow Bank to lie in wait for the coming of dusk. Luck favoring a man plays pretty tricks, and Mad Tom realized that he was able at last to clean up on this whole matter.

He could see that probably Rillard and Toskin were being polite as they played their hands. That was their game, which must make Dona laugh. He would show them, he would show her, too, and when night at last fell he knew all there was needful for him to know, for from the willows he had watched the boats.

All three had taken advantage of the gale to hunt wild geese on the outside bars. Dona had taken them over the sand and they had spread out on Quacking Towhead, hiding in pits dug in the switch willows. The geese were coming down as though they expected the wind to change into a cold northern storm. From his hiding place Mad Tom saw the hunters drop nine geese, of which Dona, in the middle blind, killed five, Rillard two, and Toskin two.

The hunters didn't wait for the night flight, but strolled together with the bird wings flapping in the gale as they walked around the south side of the bar, keeping out of the sand clouds running upwind. Dona would roast a goose, and she would serve it, with nobody but two up-the-bankers to appreciate it.

After dark he dropped silently down the Stem Chute to Two-Way, keeping close by the caving sand bar on the west side, where the current was gnawing the island. Even night has its shadows on the river, and Mad Tom ever sought the darkest.

He had no plan; he had merely rage and desire to urge him on; Rillard, Toskin, and Dona, with their boats, were now in a desolation of river back water. With luck still favoring him, he would be shut of the two men, and Dona, admiring his prowess as well as overwhelmed by his cunning masterfulness, would be his prize. She and her mother had been rich, and now their money would be his, too.

"Sho!" he whispered. "I won't have to work or take chances any more."

They were on board the shanty boat. The south wind blew the odor of the baked goose up the chute to smite his nostrils. He was jealous of those two men, eating that delicious meat. He threw out a light mud-hook and swung his launch up tight against the low sand bank, a hundred yards from the cabin boat.

He ran his hands over his shotgun, rifle and pistol holsters, wondering on which to depend. Finally he took the shotgun to crawl up on the bank and work his way down the sand through the thick growth of switch willows to where he could listen in on the merriment.

Keen as were his ears, few words and no sentences reached his interpretative faculties. He could not tell what they were talking about. He knew in his heart, however, that every advantage was his. The skiff of the two visitors was drawn up on the sand just below the shanty boat. The two would come out of the front door and walk down the sand ten yards to their craft when on their way to the Jungle.

"Then I'll get 'im!" he chuckled to himself.

He opened his shotgun to make sure there were shells in it. Those shells contained twelve buckshot each, and there were five shells in the weapon. What two scoundrels could escape a fusillade of sixty lead bullets the size of peas? Mad Tom knew it couldn't be done.

"I mustn't hit her," he assured himself. "She'd be mad if I wounded her, she sure would."

He shook his head, remarking:

"A riveh lady neveh does stand fo' any gittin' shot herself!"

Accordingly, he allowed to be perfectly sure that the girl was all clear of the shot before he opened on the two men.

"She'll be plumb proud, havin' that big motor cruiser fo' a honeymooinin'," he mused. "Shucks! That man Rillard's no 'count—"

The river rat hesitated, lowering his eyes. The twinge was still in the back of his neck where Rillard had gripped and thumbed him. For that insult, for the ducking, for all that had happened Rillard deserved to die, and must. Toskin was no 'count, and

treacherous, taking up with Dona Voane, after knowing all about Mad Tom's intending to marry her honorable. The lurker hoped the two wouldn't have a falling out with each other, the way men do sometimes, playing for a girl thataway.

"I want to take cyar of the both of 'em!" Mad Tom clicked his teeth. "I want to ferget the looks of that las' feller I killed—Lawse! How them faces do come back. Hit's dark, an' to-night I cain't see no faces—I cain't see how they look."

How long he was there Mad Tom could not tell. Time drags, yet the anticipated moment arrives before its time in such a place. He heard the diners suddenly start from their chairs. He heard an exclamation. He heard laughter, and then the front door of the cabin boat was suddenly thrown wide open as he glared, his hands grasping his shotgun.

CHAPTER X.

AN OLD MAN'S KISS.

DENTON RILLARD was shocked immeasurably to find that even down on old Mississipp' he could meet one of his own people. This Toskin had shown a lot of good sense working on advertisements. His ambition had been for special studies, and the advertisements had paid his way. Probably he was living on Rillard's money now. The thing was ridiculous, but as he thought about the matter, Rillard say how easy it had been that he should meet the young man down the Mississippi. Away back yonder, Rillard had felt the subtle appeal of wide-flowing waters, as indicated by Toskin's real art in back-grounds of the product's display type.

The elder adventuring man felt a pang as he realized that he was now old, that he had no business, no excuse, for this flight of his into the romantic sequences of youth and recklessness. Long since his own life had shaped its course.

"I'm a fool," he whispered in his heart. "Even in my temptation I called the girl Corilla. Lord, I'm a fool!"

He glared into the opaque waters of old Mississipp' and heard the coiling eddies

chuckle as they flowed along. He thought at first to blame the river for his own slipping. On second thought he saw the truth. The river had brought young Jerald Toskin down for the girl to find and bring to Montgomery Chute. And the boy, a mere strippling of twenty odd and of the girl's own age, had given her his boat, gentleman that he was, to relieve her in the embarrassing predicament in which the loss of her mother, destruction of her boat and his own position as host had left her.

There was a pang in his heart. He was old. Gray was in his hair. With youth he could not now compete. He knew how kind the river had been to him when it granted him that pretty kiss at a moment when he was lonely, but how quickly Mad Tom had come to remind him of his folly!

He was sure the girl laughed at him. What did a kiss mean to so young a person, anyhow? She just plagued him with mockery. But the girl was not plaguing Toskin. Her eyes had been all for the youth! Well, they ought to be; in his day Rillard had been specially favored. His smile changed as he thought of Corilla. Lordy, but there had been a girl in her day! Yes, indeed! For that matter, she was yet.

"Go on, Dent!" his wife had urged him when his tongue tied up at the thought of being able to trip down the rivers. She knew him; she was probably laughing at the romantic ideas in his heart, knowing them well.

"Next time—we'll go together," he said with sudden puzzlement. "Sure! I'll bet she'd go and have as much fun—if I'd go about it right."

So there he began to lay plans, scheming to make his wife see his light, and come romancing with him, somewhere away out yonder. Corilla had been a good sport; she was trim and swagger yet. She had seen clear through him, and let him have his fling.

He drew up in a bit of hauteur toward the old Mississipp', regarding the flood of muddy gold and all its people with a kind of scorn and even contempt, only to hear the eddy chuckle and to remember the thrill of the strange, unexpected, irresistible kiss, which would lie warm and taunting on his

conscience forever more—a lone monument on the grave of his temptations.

In his heart he gave over to Toskin, taking a bit of self-congratulation as a man might, at his self-abnegation. From that hour he saw the distraught thoughtfulness of the young man dreaming of the girl whose river way and feminine beauty had caught up his heart. They went together down the river, Rillard playing the skipper for the lover. The old man owed it to the girl to see that she should be forever cared for, now that on his carelessness rested the tragic consequence of the river wreck. The girl might never forgive that. She ought not to.

At Arkansaw City she had left letters for Toskin, one mailed the morning of her arrival, the other the morning of her departure. He did not show them to Rillard. He merely said it was her hurry to see about her mother's property in Vicksburg and New Orleans. She couldn't wait. Yet she had urged that he follow her.

"I'll run you down," Rillard said, adding: "She's a fine girl, Toskin. She's educated—and wise, too."

"I know," Toskin nodded. "But she don't think much of—of up-the-bankers!"

"Don't let that worry you," Rillard exclaimed. "There's one softpaw she thinks a lot about, I know."

"You—you think?" Toskin turned wonderingly.

"I know," the man laughed, giving the motor a bit more gas to gain speed on the current another mile an hour against the rising south wind.

Thus they ran into Lake Providence Reach and overtook Dona, who was trying to buck the wind, but it was too rough, even to tow behind the Jungle. They ran in on her suggestion to have a goose hunt. And they sat down to a wonderful goose supper, Dona having a great bird which she had shot the day before.

Rillard would have remained clear of the supper had not Dona insisted on his presence. This was the second evening there. By signs the old man knew the youngsters were agreed. He tried mightily to act surprised when Dona told him that she and Toskin were going to marry at Vicksburg.

"Fine!" he cried. "That's fine!"

The supper eaten, clear to the pumpkin pie, Rillard said he would be going. The two urged him not to so soon but he smiled.

"I'll take the tender over," he said.

"I'll come over in her boat," Toskin declared confidently.

"You might ask me" she exclaimed, and all laughed.

Rillard opened the door to step out on the bow platform. As the light flashed from the oil lamp gas burner, he blinked out into the darkness thus illumined over the sand bar. As he did so he saw a greenish-purple flare straight ahead of him close to the sand, where a log was lying on the ground.

The man knew that flash. It was a pair of eyes. He had seen game by fire light jacked—deer, coons, possum and even a wild-cat's eyes, so he knew this was some animal out there in the darkness of the gale. Some look in those eyes startled the man into instant action. He felt their menace, and he knew the vacancy of the bar—no legitimate thing would be thus lying out watching the shanty boat.

He drew Dona's revolver from the Cheyenne holster, and with the swift leap of long-practiced, boyish play-shooting, he leveled the weapon and on the instant fired. It was instinctive impulse. It was, too, more than this—the habitual alertness that one comes to have when old Mississipp' is in a mood to instruct its children in watchfulness.

As he fired there was the crash and flare of a gun out there in the night. A charge of shot slammed past them.

"Ouch!" Rillard exclaimed, and dashed toward the bushwhacker, firing as he ran.

Dona caught up a rifle from the corner of the cabin, and Toskin took it as he, too, ran to back up Rillard. The girl closed the door.

"All right!" Rillard cried as he threw a flashlight beam on the ground behind the drift log. "I got him!"

Every advantage had been with Mad Tom Maiton. He had figured it all out with meticulous care. One thing alone had escaped his attention—was the fact that his own eyes would flare brightly in the dark when the boat door opened. He had waited to shoot the two men, but as he glared the fire of his eyes had betrayed him.

"Good Lord, it's a man!" Rillard cried over and over again, and then he added: "I've killed a man! I've killed a man!"

"And a good job of it!" the river girl choked. "He 'lowed to bushwhack us all. Lawse! What shooting! Plumb center in the haid!"

She discovered a trickle of blood on Rillard's face. One of the high-thrown shots had grazed his scalp, parting his hair.

"We better pull right out!" Dona exclaimed.

"No." Rillard shook his head. "I won't run on a thing like this. We'll have to find the coroner or sheriff—authorities!"

"Yes, that's best!" Toskin nodded.

"Probably they'd catch us if we run, too," Dona added.

In the morning they found the river rat's launch, and Rillard, accompanied by Toskin, went down to town, where they told a deputy, and through him reached the sheriff and coroner. The three, and a posse, went up to the scene of the tragedy.

"Sho!" Sheriff Corton exclaimed. "I know that scoundrel! I had him six years ago, when I was deputy, for entering and robbing. He broke jail. That man needed killin', he did! 'Course we'll inquest 'im, but I expect he'd better be'n killed long since! You're shore lucky, Mr. Man, that charge of buckshot didn't come three inches lower—yes, indeed!"

The two witnesses testified at the coroner's inquest. Mad Tom Maiton had tried to commit crime, tried to kill Rillard, and meant no good toward either Dona or Toskin.

The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide, with which the prosecutor concurred. Rillard, trembling, and with tears in his eyes thanked them all. Old Mississip' had overwhelmed him with its menace. He had thought the eyes were a wildcat's when he fired, but he let it go that he had fought a duel with a man—and won.

"I'm leaving the river," he told the two when they were back on their boats. "Here's where I quit. Toskin, I'm leaving the Jungle in your charge. I haven't any confidence in that blamed Mendova murder boat. I'm not superstitious, but I've had

experience! You take the Jungle—you and Dona, here. Burn that blamed shanty boat!"

"Yes—but—" Toskin hesitated, glancing at Dona.

"Well," she smiled, "we don't have to go clear to Vicksburg—right down below is Lake Providence—I expect—"

"Fine!" Rillard declared. "Clear out that old shanty boat."

They carried the outfit, equipment, and other useful things on board the Jungle. They gave the furniture to darkies who were up the bank, and even offered them the shanty boat, but they wouldn't have it. A half gallon of kerosene in the cabin, and a wadded up newspaper set on fire thrown into the splash started the flames. The boat swung down the river, and smoking dark, burned itself out within five miles.

In the meanwhile the Jungle tripped on down to Lake Providence. They sparred off at the eddy below the steamboat warehouse and went uptown. The justice of the peace was right glad to welcome them. He sure was glad when these shanty boaters came to town a-marrying. According to his judgment, and generally speaking, they all ought to get married. Personally, he was just plumb glad to 'commode couples.

Rillard was sure the justice had said it just the way it ought to be. He hesitated when the bride turned to him expectantly.

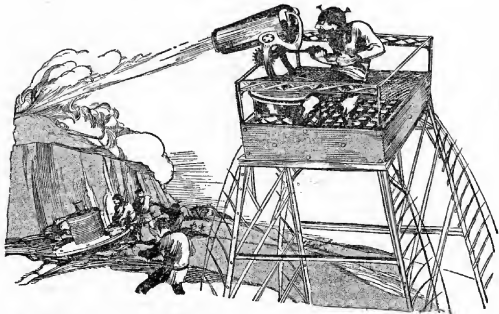
"I wish you all the happiness in the world," he said, kissing her, and when he saw the Jungle beyond as they went over the levee he added: "Now, Dona, this man of yours has talent and ability, even some reputation. Don't you let him waste them! He's an artist, you know, and he musn't be wasted. The world needs him—"

"I've two half hitches and a line bite on him," she laughed, "and when I tie in, 'tisin't to a willow stake, but good ash. We'll bring the Jungle home come spring. When we come we'll sure know what's what—"

"Good luck!" Rillard called, throwing the last line to the girl as the Jungle edged clear of the eddy.

She laughed as she threw him an old man's kiss.

THE END.



The Fire People

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Golden Atom," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

ON March 9, 1941, a strange vehicle, capable of traveling through space, lands in Wyoming. From it emerged a band of inhabitants of Mercury, bent upon the conquest of the earth. They devastate the surrounding region with a mysterious ray.

Alan Newland, son of a professor who has warned the world of a possible invasion from Mercury, discovers on an island in a Florida river a girl, much like those of earth, except that she has wings. She, too, has come from Mercury. He brings her home. Meanwhile his friend, Bob Trevor, a reporter, has been captured by the invaders in Wyoming.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE.

THE Mercutians all regarded me curiously as we came among them. By the respect they accorded Tao, and his attitude toward them, I decided he was the leader of the entire party. I stopped, wondering what would happen next. The man guarding me was still close at hand. Tao spoke a few words to him and then

moved away. My guard immediately sat down. I saw nothing was required of me at the moment, and sat down also.

I had opportunity now to examine the strange things and people about me more in detail. The Mercutians all seemed to be of the same short, squat, red-haired type. Tao was, indeed, the only one I saw who had black hair; and he was the tallest, and by far the most commanding looking figure of them all.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 21.

They wore several different costumes, although the garment of white fur was the most common. A few were dressed in the black costume of the guard in the gully. Still others were garbed only in short, wide trousers and shirts of a soft leather, with legs bare from the knee down, and with leather buskins on their feet.

The light-ray was set up near the river, on a metallic structure supporting a small platform some thirty feet above the ground. A ladder up one side gave access to this platform from below. The light itself came from a cubical metallic box, perhaps six feet square, suspended above the platform in a balancing mechanism that allowed it to swing in all directions.

All the metal of this apparatus, the projector, the platform and its framework, was apparently of the same kind; it had the appearance of burnished copper. The whole seemed fairly complicated, but not unlike a huge searchlight would appear if mounted that way.

Coming out of the projector and running down to the ground were black wires, which led to a metallic box a few feet away. This box was rectangular in shape; six feet long, perhaps, two feet broad, and the same in depth. I judged it to be the dynamo or battery from which the projector was supplied with the light-ray.

A short distance back from the river I saw what appeared to be a small mortar, which I assumed was for the sending of the light-rockets, or bombs. Several other light-ray projectors, sections of their supporting structures, and the unassembled parts of other apparatus, were lying scattered about the ground. A considerable number of the Mercutians were laboriously bringing out of the vehicle still more apparatus.

It was obvious to me then that they were only just getting started in their offensive and defensive preparations. This I could easily understand when I had watched for a moment the activities going on. All of the apparatus which they were engaged in bringing out and assembling was of metal, and it was so extremely heavy here on earth that they could hardly handle it.

Standing on the platform beside the light-ray projector were two men evidently in

charge of it at the moment. They were dressed in black, with black gloves, although without helmets. I noticed that they had little pads over their ears, with wires running from them down to a small box at the waist.

Once I saw one of them look up sharply, as though he had heard something; and, following the wave of his hand, I saw the tiny black-garbed figure of a man on the higher ground behind the gully through which we had come. I reasoned then that this was a lookout stationed there, and that he was directing the action of the light by some form of wireless telephony.

For perhaps an hour I sat there, with my guard near by watching me. I was sorry, now that I found myself in the midst of these enemies, that I had not made a determined effort to escape earlier in the day, when there would have been only four of them to cope with.

I realized that I didn't know any more now about the power this guard had over me than I had at the beginning. He certainly looked inoffensive, sitting there, but the very calmness with which he watched me made me feel I would be taking a desperate chance in attempting to escape. I decided then to wait until nightfall and to watch a favorable opportunity to break away.

Under cover of darkness, if once I could get out of their sight, I was satisfied they would never catch me. It was my plan to strike back to Garland. I had noticed carefully the lay of the land coming over, and believed I could find my way back. Then, with the car or the plane that was there in the garage, I could get back to Billings.

These thoughts were running through my mind when Tao abruptly presented himself before me and ordered me to get up. I did so, smiling in as friendly a fashion as I could manage. He then made me assist in the work of carrying the heavy pieces of apparatus. Apparently he was determined that I, as an earth man, should work hard, since the Mercutians were so heavily handicapped by the gravity of my planet. I concluded that it would be my best policy to help them all I could—that by so doing they might relax a little in their watchful-

ness, and thus enable me to get away that night.

I signified to Tao my understanding of what he was after, and made them all see my entire readiness and ability to help. For the rest of the afternoon I was dragging about from place to place, carrying the projectors to the various positions where they had decided to put them up. It seemed to be their plan to establish some twenty or thirty projectors around the vehicle; they were setting them all at points about a hundred yards away from it. These projectors differed in size and shape. Some were cubical, others pyramid-shaped, open at the base as though to send out the light in a spreading ray.

I saw now, when I had a chance to inspect the projectors closer, that they were black outside and like burnished copper inside, to reflect the light. I judged that this black covering must have been like the black suits worn by some of the men, and that it was impervious to the light-ray. Near the center of each projector was a coil of wire. The wires from outside ran to it, and across the open face of the projector a large number of fine lateral wires ran parallel, very close together.

These were about all the details I noticed. I wanted to remember them, although they conveyed very little to me, because I realized all this I was seeing might prove of immense help to the authorities when I got back to Billings.

Night came, and I was still at work. Tao seemed tremendously pleased at what I was doing, and I noticed with satisfaction that his attitude toward me seemed gradually changing. My guard still followed me about, but he did not watch me quite so closely now, I thought.

My help, that afternoon, was considerable. I was by far the strongest man in the camp; and, more than that, I was able to move about so much faster than they that I could do things in a few moments that would have taken them many times as long.

Tao personally directed most of my efforts. He told me where to take the things, and I took them, smilingly, and always coming back to him for new orders. I

moved so fast, indeed, that my guard had difficulty in keeping close to me. Several times I experimented and found that I could get away from him quite a little distance without a protest, either from him or from Tao.

As it began to grow dark, they lighted up the camp. This was accomplished by little metallic posts that had been set around at intervals. Each had a tiny coil of wire suspended at its top, which became incandescent and threw out a reddish-green light. Around each light was a square black wire cage some three feet in diameter. I conjectured that these lights used the same ray as the projectors, only in a different form, and that the cage was to protect any one from going too close. The light from these illuminators was much the same in aspect as the ray, except that it seemed to diffuse itself readily and carried only a comparatively short distance.

The scene now, under this red-green glare, was weird in the extreme. The work all about me went on steadily. The Mercutians were all dressed in white furry garments now—I concluded because of the cold—with the exception of those who had on the suits and helmets of black.

The reddish-green light made them all appear like little gnomes at work. Indeed, the whole scene, with its points of color in the darkness, and the huge monstrous shadows all about, was more like some fantastic picture out of a fairy book than a scene on this earth.

Soon after nightfall Tao stopped me, and one of his men brought me something to eat. I still had the slices of bread and meat in my pocket, but, thinking I might need them later on, I kept them there. Tao and I sat down near one of the lights and ate together. We were served by one of the men. My guard still kept close at hand.

The food was nothing more than hard pieces of baked dough and a form of sweet something like chocolate. For drink there was a hot liquid quite comparable to tea. This was served us in small metal cups with handles that seemed to be insulated from the heat.

This meal was brought to us from in-

side the vehicle. While we were eating I could see many of the Mercutians going inside and coming out with pieces of this food in their hands, eating as they worked. Quite obviously the business of assembling their apparatus was uppermost in the minds of all of them.

The whole atmosphere about the place, I realized now, in spite of the opposite effect their dragging footsteps gave, was one of feverish activity. When we had eaten Tao seemed willing to sit quiet for a while. My efforts to talk to him amused us both greatly, and I noticed with satisfaction that he seemed to trust me more and more.

Finally my guard spoke, asking permission, I judged, to leave us and go have his dinner. My heart leaped into my throat as I saw him go, leaving me alone with Tao. I concluded that now, if ever, was my opportunity. Tao trusted me—seemed to like me, in fact. No one else in the camp was paying the least attention to us. If only I could, on some pretext, get myself a reasonable distance away from him I would make a run for it.

I was turning this problem over in my mind when it was unexpectedly solved for me. A low throbbing, growing momentarily louder, sounded from the air—the hum of an airplane motor. I think Tao noticed it first—I saw him cock his head to one side, listening.

After a moment, as the sound increased, he climbed to his feet and shouted an order to the man nearest us.

The night had clouded over; it was unusually dark. I knew that a plane without lights was approaching. Work about the camp stopped; every one stood listening. I looked up at the light-ray platform. The two men there were swinging the light back and forth, sweeping the sky.

Suddenly the sound ceased; the plane's motor had been shut off. Almost at the same instant the light-ray picked up the plane. It was several thousand feet in the air and almost over our heads, coming down in a spiral. A moment more and the light-ray swung away.

The plane burst into flame, and I knew it was falling. An explosion sounded near at hand. The camp was in chaos imme-

diately. I faced about to look at Tao; he had disappeared.

I waited no longer. Turning back from the river, I ran at full speed.

CHAPTER IX.

FUTILE ATTACKS.

THERE seemed to be no pursuit. In a few moments I was clear of the camp and hidden in the darkness of the desert. I ran perhaps half a mile, then I slowed down to a walk, completely winded. Turning, I could see behind me the lights of the camp. I doubted if even now they had missed me. The bomb dropped by the airplane and the plane itself falling almost in their midst must have plunged them for the time into confusion.

I kept on walking rapidly. The desert here was almost pathless; occasionally I would cross a wandering wagon track, but none of them seemed going in my direction. After a time I was not sure what my direction was; all about me was a luminous darkness—and silence.

I found myself now almost exhausted from my exertions of the day. I decided to go possibly a mile farther—to be well away from the Mercutians—and then to lie down and sleep until daylight.

In about fifteen minutes more I concluded I had gone far enough, and, lying down on the sand, was soon fast asleep. When I awoke it was daylight, with the sun just rising.

With returning consciousness I looked about me in sudden fear, but there was no one in sight. I ate the bread and meat I had in my pocket, and, feeling much refreshed, but thirsty, I started again for Garland.

I made the town soon after noon that day. The little automobile was still standing in the garage, and I started it without trouble. Before I left I went up to the porch of the house.

The bodies of Mercer and the Mercutian were still lying there. I dragged Mercer's body down the steps and put it into the back seat of the car. Then I started off. I stuck to the main road, and went through

Mantua at top speed, apprehensive that some of the Mercutians might be there. This town, like Garland, was completely burned. Only the chimneys were left standing amid piles of ashes.

At Frannie I took on two passengers. There was much curiosity on the part of those I met along here, but I was unwilling to explain, deciding it best to wait and tell my whole story to the military authorities at Billings.

It was early afternoon when I got back to Billings. This was March 12. I turned Mercer's body over to the police, who promptly took me in charge. I gave them a brief outline of what had occurred. General Price, whose command of the United States military operations against the Mercutians was announced to the country two days later, had arrived that morning in Billings by airplane. I demanded to see him, and when my business was explained to him he granted me an immediate interview.

General Price was a man about fifty, a kindly gentleman of the old Southern type, yet of thoroughly military demeanor. I told him everything that had happened to me in detail as complete as I possibly could. Mercer's body was examined that same afternoon. It was found to have been drilled completely through the chest by a hole about the diameter of a lead pencil. This hole did not seem to have been made by the passage of any foreign object, but had more the aspect of a burn. I understood then—Mercer had been killed by a tiny light-ray projector, with a short, effective radius, aimed probably like a revolver.

What I was able to tell General Price about the Mercutians naturally was invaluable to him. He asked me then to remain close to him during the forthcoming operations. We arranged that I was on honor to give nothing out to my paper without his approval.

The situation, as it appeared during the next few days, was not one of grave danger. We were able to gage now with fair probability of correctness the offensive strength of our enemies. They had no means of transportation—could only move from their present position slowly and with extreme

difficulty. The possibility of the vehicle itself moving occurred to us; but, as I pointed out, the task of replacing their heavy apparatus in it, and then reassembling the apparatus in a new position, made such a step impractical.

The only weapon the Mercutians had displayed so far was the light-ray in its several forms. This seemed effective for ten miles at most. That the Mercutians could be attacked by our artillery and destroyed seemed certain.

By the 20th General Price had mobilized some ten thousand men. They encamped on the prairie near Billings. The artillery was moved down to a point near the Wyoming State line, about fifteen miles directly north of the Mercutian camp.

Six days before this, forty-eight hours after I had returned to Billings, observation planes had reported the establishment of two more light-rays, similar in appearance to the first. During the succeeding days others rapidly appeared. By the 20th there were probably thirty of them altogether.

The reports stated that all were set up within a space seemingly of a few hundred yards. They were of different diameters; some projected in parallel rays, others spread out fan-shaped. These latter appeared not to carry so far. The first one that had appeared, it was judged, had the longest effective radius of them all.

During these days and nights preceding the 20th the light-rockets had been fired with increasing frequency, but none was observed to carry over six or eight miles. By this time the burned area for a circle of ten miles all around the Mercutian camp was entirely depopulated, and no additional destruction was reported.

On the night of the 20th, firing by directions from captive balloons, the United States artillery began its bombardment from the Montana-Wyoming line. After sending over some twenty shells, the firing ceased. It was learned then that they had proven utterly ineffective. The diverging rays of the Mercutian light had thrown a barrage around their position. The shells striking the light had all exploded harmlessly in the air.

Subsequent bombardments made that night met with no better success. The fact became obvious then that to artillery fire the Mercutians were impregnable. For several days no further military operations were attempted, with the exception of an occasional shell futilely thrown against the light-rays.

The newspapers during these days were full of discussions—scientific and otherwise—as to how this strange enemy of mankind could be destroyed or dislodged. This was like no other warfare in history. The newspaper statements gave the inference that General Price was entirely at a loss how to proceed.

As a matter of fact, the press was quite correct in that assumption; and, since the Mercutians were making no offensive moves, General Price decided to do nothing until he was better informed.

I was fortunate enough to be present the next day at a conference the general had with several scientific men who had come to Billings to meet him. It was the opinion of these men of science that no artillery fire could penetrate the light-barrage the Mercutians had thrown about them. No airplane attack was practical, and to attack them from the ground with infantry would be absurd.

On the other hand, it seemed obvious that the Mercutians could make no offensive move either. They had probably already done all the damage that they could. If matters were allowed to remain as they now were—thus avoiding the useless sacrifice of men—inevitably the time would come when the food supply the Mercutians had brought with them would be exhausted. Meanwhile, if the invaders decided to move in their vehicle to another location, they could not do so suddenly without abandoning their apparatus.

Any lessening in the number of light-rays in operation could be taken as an indication that a move of this kind was in preparation, and the warning would give General Price time to execute any attack that in the meantime might be planned.

It was decided then to remain comparatively inactive and await developments from the opposite side.

During the three months that followed this decision artillery bases were located at intervals on a circumference of about fifteen miles around the Mercutian center. These were all on desert country. Lines of communication between them were established, and the air above was thoroughly patrolled night and day.

The ten thousand men under General Price it was not thought necessary or advisable to augment. They were deployed around this circumference in front of the artillery, nearer the ten-mile limit. Machine-gun outposts, manned by volunteers exclusively, were established in Garland, Mantua and other points within the area controlled by the light. These were for the purpose of preventing, or reporting, any possible movements on foot of the Mercutians.

During this time the government was, naturally, subjected to much harsh criticism for its waiting attitude. It was suggested that armored tanks—relics of the World War—could be put into commission. These, under cover of darkness, could be used to rush the Mercutian position. This obviously was an absurd plan, since the light-ray would instantly raise the temperature of the metal composing the car to such a height that the men inside would be killed—not to mention the fact that all explosives in the car would be instantly detonated.

Another suggestion was that a night raid be made upon the outposts of the camp by a few men armed with machine guns fired from the shoulder, in an effort to capture one of the Mercutians garbed in a suit impervious to the light. With this suit even one man with a machine gun would probably be able to clean out the Mercutian camp.

This plan evoked much favorable comment. This black material, once in our possession, could be analyzed and possibly be duplicated in quantity by us. It seemed the logical way of making progress.

But, unfortunately, conditions around the Mercutian camp at present were not the same as that night when I escaped. At that time it would have been feasible; now it was impossible, for all the invaders were within the small circle of projectors, and

the ground outside this circle was never free from the diverging rays of the light. Also, as one newspaper article replied, even with such a suit of armor a man with a machine gun could do little, for the light would instantly render useless the gun itself.

So the controversy went on, and General Price waited, knowing that each day must bring the enemy nearer starvation. Such was the condition of affairs in the latter part of June.

Then, one morning, I received a telegram from Alan Newland in Florida. I had been corresponding with him at intervals, but he had never given me a hint of what had happened down there.

The telegram read:

Important Mercutian development here.
Keep absolutely secret. Join us here at once.
Answer.

I wired him immediately. Three days later I was at Bay Head.

CHAPTER X.

MIELA'S STORY.

WHEN I reached the little Florida town Alan was there to meet me.

He would have none of my eager questions, but took me at once by launch to their bungalow. No one was on the porch when we landed, and we went immediately into the living room. There I found Beth and Professor Newland talking to this extraordinary girl from another world, of whose existence, up to that moment, I had been in complete ignorance. She was dressed especially for my coming, they told me afterward, exactly as she had been that morning when Alan found her. They wanted to confound me, and they succeeded.

I stood staring in amazement while Beth quietly introduced me. And Miela spread her wings, curtsied, and replied in a quaint, soft little voice: "I am honored, sir." Then she laughed prettily and, extending her hand, added: "How do you do, Bob—my friend?"

When I had partially recovered from my

astonishment Miela put on the big blue-cloth cape she wore constantly to cover her wings. Then Alan and Beth plunged into an excited explanation of how he had found Miela, and how all this time she had remained in seclusion with them there studying their language.

"You never have seen such assiduous young people," Professor Newland put in. "And certainly she has been a wonderful pupil."

He patted Miela's hand affectionately; but I noticed then that his eyes were very sad, as though from some unvoiced trouble or apprehension.

They had decided, the professor said, to keep the girl's presence a secret from the world until they had learned from her in detail what her mission was. The vehicle in which she had come was still on the island up the bayou. Alan had stationed there three young men of Bay Head whom he could trust. They were living on the island, guarding it.

During these two months while Miela, with uncanny rapidity, was mastering their language, the Newlands had of course learned from her all she had to tell them. The situation in Wyoming did not necessitate haste on their part, and so they had waited. And now, with a decision reached, they sent for me.

That evening after supper we all went out on the bungalow porch, and Miela told me her story. She spoke quietly, with her hands clasped nervously in her lap. At times in her narrative her eyes shone with the eager, earnest sincerity of her words; at others they grew big and troubled as she spoke of the problems that were harassing her world and mine—the inevitable self-struggles of humanity, whatever its environment, itself its own worst enemy.

"I am daughter of Lua," Miela began slowly, "of the Great City in the Country of Light. My mother, Lua, is a teacher of the people. My father, Thaal, died when still I was a child. I—I came to your earth—"

She paused and, turning to Beth, added appealingly:

"Oh, there is so much—to begin—how can I tell—"

"Tell him about Tao," Beth said.

"Tao!" I exclaimed.

"He leads those who came to your earth in the north," Miela went on. "He was my"—she looked to Alan for the word—"my suitor there in the Great City. He wished me for his wife—for the mother of his children. But that—that was not what I wished."

"You'd better tell him about conditions in your world first, Miela," said Alan. He spoke very gently, tenderly.

I had already seen, during supper, how he felt toward her; I could readily understand it, too, for, next to Beth, she seemed the most adorable woman I had ever met. There was nothing unusually strange about her, when her wings were covered, except her quaint accent and sometimes curious gestures; and no one could be with her long without feeling the sweet gentleness of her nature and loving her for it.

"Tell him about your women," Beth added.

I noticed the affectionate regard she also seemed to have for Miela; and I noticed, too, that there was in her face that vague look of sorrow that was in her father's.

The habitable world of Mercury, Miela then went on to tell me, was divided into three zones—light, twilight and darkness. There was no direct sunlight in the Light Country—only a diffused daylight like the light on our earth when the sky is clouded over. The people of the Light Country, Miela's people, were the most civilized and the ruling race.

In the twilight zone around them, grading back to the Dark Country, various other peoples dwelt, and occasionally warred with their neighbors for possession of land in the light.

In the center of the Light Country, directly underneath the sun—that is, where the sun would always appear near the zenith—was the Fire Country. Here, owing to violent storms, the atmospheric envelope of the planet was frequently disturbed sufficiently to allow passage for the sun's direct rays. Then would ensue in that locality, for a limited time, a heat so intense as to destroy life. This Fire Country was practically uninhabited.

"You see, Bob," Alan interrupted, "the dark part of Mercury—that is the side that continually faces away from the sun—is also practically uninhabited. Only strange animals and savages live there. And the twilight zones, and the ring of Light Country, with the exception of its center, are too densely populated. This has caused an immense amount of trouble. The Twilight People are an inferior race. They have tried to mix with those of the Light Country. It doesn't work. There's been trouble for generations; trouble over the women, for one thing. Anyhow, the Twilight People have been kept out as much as possible. Now this fellow Tao—"

"Let Miela explain about the women first," Beth interjected.

Then Miela went on to tell me that only the females of Mercury had wings—given them by the Creator as a protection against the pursuit of the male. At marriage, to insure submission to the will of her husband, a woman's wings were clipped. For more than a generation now there had been a growing rebellion on the part of the women against this practice. In this movement Miela's mother, Lua, was a leader. To overcome this masculine desire for physical superiority and dominance which he had had for centuries seemed practically impossible. Yet, Miela said, the leaders of the women now felt that some progress was being made in changing public sentiment, although so far not a single man had been found who would take for mate a woman with wings unclipped.

This was partly from personal pride and partly because the laws of the country made such a union illegal, its parties moral outlaws, its children illegitimate, and thus not entitled to the government benefits bestowed upon all offspring of legitimate parentage. It was this man-made law the women were fighting, and of recent years fighting more and more militantly.

This was the situation when Tao suddenly projected himself into public affairs as the leader of a new movement. Tao had paid court to Miela without success. He was active in the fight against the woman movement—a brilliant orator, crafty, unscrupulous, a good leader. Leadership was

to him purely a matter of personal gain. He felt no deep, sincere interest in any public movement for any other reason.

Interplanetary communication had become of latter years a possibility; science had invented and perfected the means. So far these vehicles had only been used for short trips to the outer edge of the atmosphere of Mercury—trips that were giving scientific men much valuable knowledge of atmospheric conditions, and which it was thought would ultimately enable them to counteract the storms and make the Fire Country habitable. No trips into space had been made.

Tao now came forward with the proposition to undertake a new world conquest—a conquest of Venus or the earth. These planets recently had been observed from the vehicles. This, he said, would solve the land question, which, after all, was more serious than the clipping of women's wings.

He found many followers—adventurers, principally, to whom the possibilities for untold personal gain in such a conquest appealed. Then abruptly the women took part. Dropping for the time their own fight, they opposed Tao vigorously. If Venus or the earth were inhabited, as it was thought they were, such an expedition would be a war against humanity. It would result in the needless destruction of human life.

In this controversy the government of the Light Country remained neutral. But the women finally won, and Tao and his followers, a number of them men of science, were all banished by the government, under pressure of popular sentiment, into the Twilight Country.

Here Tao's project fell upon fertile soil. The Twilight People had every reason to undertake such a conquest; and Tao became their leader in preparing for it. These preparations were known in the Light Country. The government made no effort to prevent them. It was, indeed, rather glad of the possibility of being rid of its disturbing neighbors.

Only the women were concerned, but they alone could do nothing, since by principle they were as much opposed to offensive

warfare against the Twilight People as against the possible inhabitants of the earth. Miela paused at this point in her narrative. The thing was getting clearer to me now, but I could not reconcile this feeble attempt to conquer the earth which we were then fighting in Wyoming with the picture she drew. I said so.

"She hasn't come to that," Alan broke in. "You see, Bob, Tao, with about a hundred followers, was banished to the Twilight Country a couple of years ago. There was plenty of brains in the party, scientific men and such. They had only one vehicle, but they have been at work ever since building a lot of others.

"This expedition of Tao to Wyoming—with only about a hundred of the Twilight People with him—is not intended to be an offensive operation at all. He's only looking the situation over, finding out what they're up against. They decided before they started that the light-ray would protect them from anything on earth, and they have only come to look around.

"Right now up there"—Alan leaned forward earnestly, and in the moonlight I could see the flush on his handsome face—"right now up there in the Twilight Country of Mercury they're working their damndest over all kinds of preparations. This Wyoming business this summer does not mean a thing. Tao will quit it any minute. You'll see. Some morning we'll wake up and find them gone. Probably they'll destroy their apparatus, and not bother to take it back.

"And then, in a year or two, they'll be here again. Not one vehicle next time, but a hundred. They'll land all over the earth at once, not on a desert—Tao probably only picked that this time to avoid complications—but in our big cities, New York, Paris, London, all of them at once. That's what we've got to face.

"If Tao comes back as he plans, we have not got a chance. That's why Miela stole this little vehicle and, without it being publicly known in Mercury, came here to warn us. That's what she was after, to help us, risked her life to warn us people of another world."

Alan stopped abruptly, and, dropping to

the floor of the porch beside Miela, laid his arm across her lap, looking up into her face as though she were a goddess. She stroked his hair tenderly, and I could see her eyes were wet with tears.

There was a moment's silence. I could not have known what Professor Newland and Beth were thinking, but a moment later I understood.

Then I realized the sorrow that was oppressing them both.

"What can be done?" I asked finally.

Alan jumped to his feet. He began pacing up and down the porch before us; evidently he was laboring under a great nervous excitement.

"There's nothing to be done," he said—"nothing at all—here on earth. We have not got a chance. It's up there the thing has got to be fought out—up there on Mercury—to keep them from returning."

Alan paused again. When he resumed his voice was pitched lower, but was very tense.

"I'm going there, Bob—with Miela."

I heard Professor Newland's sharply indrawn breath, and saw Beth's dear face suddenly whiten.

"I'm going there to fight it out with them. I may come back; I may not. But if I am successful, *they* never will—which is all that matters.

"Miela's mother gave her up to come down here and help us. It is a little thing to go back there to help us, also. If I can help her people with their own problems, so much the better."

He pulled Miela to her feet beside him and put his arm protectingly about her shoulders.

"And Miela is going back to her world as my wife—her body unmutated—the first married woman in Mercury with wings as God gave them to her!"

CHAPTER XI.

TO SAVE THE WORLD.

TWO days later Alan and Miela were quietly married in Bay Head. She still wore the long cloak, and no one could have suspected she was other than a

beautiful stranger in the little community. When we got back home Alan immediately made her take off the cloak. He wanted us to admire her wings—to note their long, soft red feathers as she extended them, the symbol and the tangible evidence of her freedom from male dominance.

She was as sweet about it all as she could be, blushing, as though to expose the wings, now that she was married, were immodest. And by the way she regarded Alan, by the gentleness and love in her eyes, I could see she would never be above the guidance, the dominance, of one man, at least.

The day before their marriage Alan had taken me up the bayou to see the little silver car in which Miela had come. I was intensely curious to learn the workings of this strange vehicle. As soon as we were inside I demanded that Alan explain it all to me in detail.

He smiled.

"That's the remarkable part of it, Bob," he answered. "Miela herself didn't thoroughly understand either the basic principle or the mechanism itself when she started down here."

"Good Lord! And she ventured—"

"Tao was already on the point of leaving when she conceived the idea. He had already made one trip almost to the edge of the earth's atmosphere, you know, and now was ready to start again."

"That first trip was last November," I said. "Tell me about that. What were those first light-meteors for?"

"As far as I can gather from what Miela says," Alan answered, "Tao wanted to make perfectly sure the light-ray would act in our atmosphere. He came—there were several vehicles they had ready even then—without other apparatus than those meteors, as we called them. Those he dropped to earth with the light-ray stored in them. They *did* discharge it properly—they seemed effective. The thing was merely a test. Tao was satisfied, and went back to arrange for this second preliminary venture in which he is engaged now."

"I understand," I said. "Go on about Miela."

"Well, she and her mother went before

the Scientific Society, she calls it—the men who own and control these vehicles in the Light Country. They called it suicide. No one could be found to come with her. Lua, her mother, wanted to, but Miela would not let her take the risk, saying she was needed more there in her own world.

"As a matter of fact, the thing, while difficult perhaps to understand in principle, in operation works very simply. Miela knew that, and merely asked them to show her how to operate it practically. This they did. She spent two days with them—she learns things rather easily, you know—and then she was ready."

I waited in amazement.

"For practical purposes all she had to understand was the operation of these keys. The pressure of the light-ray in these coils"—he was standing beside a row of wire coils which in the semidarkness I had not noticed before—"is controlled by the key-switches." He indicated the latter as he spoke. "They send a current to the outer metal plates of the car which makes them repel or attract other masses of matter, as desired."

"All that Miela had to understand then was how to operate these keys so as to keep the base of the vehicle headed toward the earth. They took her to the outer edge of the atmosphere of Mercury over the Dark Country and showed her the earth. They have used terrestrial telescopes for generations, and since the invention of this vehicle telescopes for celestial observation have been greatly improved."

"All Miela had to do was keep the air in here purified. That is a simple chemical operation. By using this attractive and repellent force she allowed the earth's gravity and the repelling power of the sun and Mercury to drive her here."

He paused.

"But, doesn't she—don't you understand the thing in detail?" I asked finally.

"I think father and I understand it now better than she does," he answered. "We have studied it out here and questioned her as closely as possible. We understand its workings pretty thoroughly. But the exact nature of the light-ray we do not understand, any more than we understand elec-

tricity. Nor do we understand this metallic substance which when charged with the current becomes attractive or repellent in varying degrees."

"Yes," I said. "That I can appreciate."

"Father has a theory about the light-ray," he went on, "which seems rather reasonable from what we can gather from Miela. The thing seems more like electricity than anything else, and father thinks now that it is generated by dynamos on Mercury, similar to those we use here for electricity."

"Along that line," I said, "can you explain why this light-ray, which will immediately set anything on fire that is combustible, and which acts through metal, like those artillery shells, for instance, does not seem to raise the temperature of the ground it strikes to any extent?"

"Because, like electricity, it is dissipated the instant it strikes the ground. The earth is an inexhaustible storehouse and receptacle for such a force. That is why the broken country around the Shoshone River protected Garland and Mantua from its direct rays."

"Tell me about the details of this mechanism," I said, reverting to our original subject. "You say you understand its workings pretty thoroughly now."

"Yes, I do," he admitted, "and so does father. But I cannot go into it now with you. You see," he added hastily, as though he feared to hurt my feelings, "the scientific men of Mercury—some of them—objected to Miela's coming, on the ground that the inhabitants of the earth, obtaining from her a knowledge that would enable them to voyage through space, might take advantage of that knowledge to undertake an invasion of Mercury."

"As a matter of fact, that was a remote possibility. I could explain to you all I know about this mechanism without much danger of your ever being able to build such a car. But Miela promised them that she would use all possible precautions, in the event of her having any choice in the matter, to prevent the earth people learning anything about it."

"Father and I have examined everything

here closely. But no one else has—and I am sure Miela would prefer no one else did. You understand, Bob?"

I did understand; and of course I had to be satisfied with that.

"It seems to me," I said when, later in the day, we were discussing affairs in Wyoming, "that with things in Mercury as we now know they are, it would help the situation tremendously if Tao and these Twilight People with him were prevented from ever returning."

"That's my idea exactly," Professor Newland agreed.

I could see by the look on his face he was holding on to this thought as a possibility that might make Alan's plan unnecessary.

"I've thought about it constantly," the professor said, "ever since these facts first came to us through Miela. It *would* be important. With his expedition here a total failure, I think we might assume that nothing more would be done up there in attempting to conquer the earth. I've tried to make Alan see that we should give the authorities all the information we have. It might help—something might be accomplished—"

"Nothing would, father," Alan interrupted. "There wouldn't be time. And even if this expedition of Tao's were destroyed, I don't see why that's any guarantee another attempt would not be made. Miela doesn't, either, and she ought to know."

"Besides, don't you see, Bob"—he turned to me earnestly—"I can't have the eyes of the world turned on Miela and her affairs? Why, think of it—this little woman sent to Washington, questioned, photographed, written about, made sport of, perhaps, in the newspapers! And all for nothing. It is unthinkable."

"You may be right, my boy," said the professor sadly. "I am giving in to you, but I still—"

"The thing has come to me," said Alan. "A duty—a responsibility put squarely up to me. I've accepted it. I'll do my best all the way."

A week after Alan and Miela were married the report came that the Mercutians

had suddenly departed, abandoning, after partly destroying, their apparatus. The world for a few days was in trepidation, fearing a report that they had landed somewhere else, but no such report came.

Three days later Alan and Miela followed them into space.

Professor Newland, Beth and I went up the bayou with them that morning they left. We were a solemn little party, none of us seemingly wishing to voice the thoughts that possessed us all.

Professor Newland never spoke once during the trip. When the moment of final parting came he kissed Miela quietly, and, pressing Alan's hand, said simply: "Good luck, my boy. We appreciate what you are doing for us. Come back, some day, if you can."

Then he faced about abruptly and trudged back to the launch alone, as pathetic a figure as I have ever seen. We all exchanged our last good-bys, little Beth in tears clinging to Alan, and then kissing Miela and making her promise some day to come back with Alan when he had accomplished his mission.

Then they entered the vehicle. Its heavy door closed. A moment later it rose silently—slowly at first, then with increasing velocity until we could see it only as a little speck in the air above us. And then it was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LANDING ON MERCURY.

(Narrative continued by Alan Newland.)

WITH hardly more than a perceptible tremor our strange vehicle came to rest upon the surface of Mercury. For a moment Miela and I stood regarding each other silently. Then she left her station at the levers of the mechanism and placed her hands gently on my shoulders. "You are welcome, my husband, here to my world."

I kissed her glowing, earnest face. We had reached our journey's end. My work was about to begin—upon my own efforts now depended the salvation of that great

world I had left behind. What difficulties, what dangers, would I have to face, here among the people of this strange planet? I thrilled with awe at the thought of it; and I prayed God then to hold me firm and steadfast to my purpose.

Miela must have divined my thoughts, for she said simply: "You will have great power here, Alan; and it is in my heart that you will succeed."

We slid back one of the heavy metallic curtains and looked out through the thick glass of the window. It was daylight—a diffused daylight like that of a cloudy mid-day on my own earth. An utterly barren waste met my gaze. We seemed to have landed in a narrow valley. Huge cliffs rose on both sides to a height of a thousand feet or more.

These cliffs, as well as the floor of the valley itself, shone with a brilliant glare, even in the half light of the sunless day. They were not covered with soil, but seemed rather to be almost entirely metallic, copper in color. The whole visible landscape was devoid of any sign of vegetation, nor was there a single living thing in sight.

I shuddered at the inhospitable bleakness of it.

"Where are we, Miela?"

She smiled at my tone. It was my first sight of Mercury except vague, distant glimpses of its surface through the mist coming down.

"You do not like my world?"

She was standing close beside me, and at her smiling words raised one of her glorious red wings and spread it behind me as though for protection. Then, becoming serious once more, she answered my question.

"We are fortunate, Alan. It is the Valley of the Sun, in the Light Country. I know it well. We are very close to the Great City."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'll leave it all to you, little wife. Shall we start at once?"

Her hand pressed mine.

"I shall lead you now," she said. "But afterward—you it will be who leads *me*—who leads us all."

She crossed to the door fastenings. As she loosed them I remember I heard a slight hissing sound. Before I could reach her she slid back the door. A great wave of air rushed in upon us, sweeping us back against the wall. I clutched at something for support, but the sweep of wind stopped almost at once.

I had stumbled to my knees. "Miela!" I cried in terror.

She was beside me in an instant, wide-eyed with fear, which even then I could see was fear only for me.

I struggled to my feet. My head was roaring. All the blood in my body seemed rushing to my face.

After a moment I felt better. Miela pulled me to a seat.

"I did not think, Alan. The pressure of the air is different here from your world. It was so wrong of me, for I knew. It was so when I landed there on your earth."

I had never thought to ask her that, nor had she ever spoken of it to me. She went on now to tell me how, when first she had opened the door on that little Florida island, all the air about her seemed rushing away. She had felt then as one feels transported quickly to the rarified atmosphere of a great height.

Here the reverse had occurred. We had brought with us, and maintained, an air density such as that near sea level on earth. But here on Mercury the air was far denser, and its pressure had rushed in upon us instantly the door was opened. Miela had been affected to a much less extent than I, and in consequence recovered far more quickly.

The feeling, after the first nausea, the pressure and pain in my ears and the roaring in my head, had passed away. A sense of heaviness, an inability to breathe with accustomed freedom, remained with me for days.

We sat quiet for some minutes, and then left the vehicle. Miela was dressed now as I had first seen her on the Florida bayou. As we stepped upon the ground she suddenly tore the veil from her breast, spread her wings, and, with a laugh of sheer delight, flew rapidly up into the air. I stood watching her, my heart beating fast. Up—up

she went into the gray haze of the sky. Then I could see her spread her great wings, motionless, a giant bird soaring over the valley.

A few moments more, and she was again beside me, alighting on the tip of one toe with perfect poise and grace almost within reach of my hand.

I do not quite know what feelings possessed me at that moment. Perhaps it was a sense of loss as I saw this woman I loved fly away into the air while I remained chained to the ground. I cannot tell. But when she came back, dropping gently down beside me, ethereal and beautiful as an angel from heaven itself, a sudden rush of love swept over me.

I crushed her to me, glorying in the strength of my arms and the frailness of her tender little body.

When I released her she looked up into my eyes archly.

"You do not like me to fly? Your wife is free—and, oh, Alan, it is so good—so good to be back here again where I *can* fly."

She laughed at my expression.

"You are a man, too—like all the men of my world. That is the feeling you came here to conquer, Alan—so that the women here may all keep their wings—and be free."

I think I was just a little ashamed of myself for a moment. But I knew my feeling had been only human. I *did* want her to fly, to keep those beautiful wings. And in that moment they came to represent not only her freedom, but my trust in her, my very love itself.

I stroked their sleek red feathers gently with my hand.

"I shall never feel that way again, Miela," I said earnestly.

She laughed once more and kissed me, and the look in her eyes told me she understood.

The landscape, from this wider viewpoint, seemed even more bleak and desolate than before. The valley was perhaps half a mile broad, and wound away upward into a bald range of mountains in the distance.

The ground under my feet was like a

richly metallic ore. In places it was wholly metal, smooth and shining like burnished copper. Below us the valley broadened slightly, falling into what I judged must be open country where lay the city of our destination.

For some minutes I stood appalled at the scene. I had often been in the deserts of America, but never have I felt so great a sense of desolation. Always before it had been the lack of water that made the land so arid; and always the scene seemed to hold promise of latent fertility, as though only moisture were needed to make it spring into fruition.

Nothing of the kind was evident here. There was, indeed, no lack of water. I could see a storm cloud gathering in the distance. The air I was breathing seemed unwarrantably moist; and all about me on the ground little pools remained from the last rainfall. But here there was no soil, not so much even as a grain of sand seemed to exist. The air was warm, as warm as a midsummer's day in my own land, a peculiarly oppressive, moist heat.

I had been prepared for this by Miela. I was bareheaded, since there never was to be direct sunlight. My feet were clad in low shoes with rubber soles. I wore socks. For the rest, I had on simply one of my old pairs of short, white running pants and a sleeveless running shirt. With the exception of the shoes it was exactly the costume I had worn in the races at college.

I had been standing motionless, hardly more than a step from the car in which we had landed. Suddenly, in the midst of my meditations on the strange scene about me, Miela said:

"Go there, Alan."

She was smiling and pointing to a little rise of ground near by. I looked at her blankly.

"Jump, Alan," she added.

The spot to which she pointed was perhaps forty feet away. I knew what she meant, and, stepping back a few paces, came running forward and leaped into the air. I cleared the intervening space with no more effort than I could have jumped less than half that distance on earth.

Miela flew over beside me.

"You see, Alan, my husband, it is not so bad, perhaps, that I can fly."

She was smiling whimsically, but I could see her eyes were full of pride.

"There is no other man on Mercury who could do that, Alan," she added.

I tried successive leaps then, always with the same result. I calculated that here the pull of gravity must be something less than one-half that on the earth. It was far more than father had believed.

Miela watched my antics, laughing and clapping her hands with delight. I found I tired very quickly—that is, I was winded. This I attributed to the greater density of the air I was breathing.

In five minutes I was back at Miela's side, panting heavily.

"If I can—ever get so I breathe right—" I said.

She nodded. "A very little time, I think."

I sat down for a moment to recover my breath. Miela explained then that we were some ten miles from the fertile country surrounding the city in which her mother lived, and about fifteen miles from the outskirts of the city itself. I give these distances as they would be measured on earth. We decided to start at once. We took nothing with us. The journey would be a short one, and we could easily return at some future time for what we had left behind. We needed no food for so short a trip, and plenty of water was at hand.

Only one thing Miela would not part with—the single memento she had brought from earth to her mother. She refused to let me touch it, but insisted on carrying it herself, guarding it jealously.

It was Beth's little ivory hand mirror!

We started off. Miela had wound the filmy scarf about her shoulders again with a pretty little gesture.

"I need not use wings, Alan, when I am with you. We shall go together, you and I—on the ground."

And then, as I started off vigorously, she added plaintively from behind me: "If—if you will go slow, my husband, or will wait for me."

I altered my pace to suit hers. I had quite recovered my breath now, and for

the moment felt that I could carry her much faster than she could walk. I did gather her into my arms once, and ran forward briskly, while she laughed and struggled with me to be put down. She seemed no more than a little child in my arms; but, as before, the heavy air so oppressed me that in a few moments I was glad enough to set her again upon her feet.

The valley broadened steadily as we advanced. For several miles the look of the ground remained unchanged. I wondered what curious sort of metal this might be—so like copper in appearance. I doubted if it were copper, since even in this hot, moist air it seemed to have no property of oxidation.

I asked Miela about it, and she gave me its Mercutian name at once; but of course that helped me not a bit. She added that outcroppings of it, almost in the pure state, like the great deposits of native copper I had seen on earth, occurred in many parts of Mercury.

I remembered then Bob Trevor's mention of it as the metal of the apparatus used by the invaders of Wyoming.

We went on three or four miles without encountering a single sign of life. No insects stirred underfoot; no birds flew overhead. We might have been—by the look of it—alone on a dead planet.

"Is none of your mountain country inhabited, Miela?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Only on the plains do people live. There is very little of good land in the Light Country, and so many people. That it is which has caused much trouble in the past. It is for that, many times, the Twilight People have made war upon us."

I found myself constantly able to breathe more easily. Our progress down the valley seemed now irritatingly slow, for I felt I could walk or run three times faster than Miela. Finally I suggested to her that she fly, keeping near me; and that I would make the best speed forward I could. She stared at me quizzically. Then, seeing I was quite sincere, she flung her little arms up about my neck and pulled me down to kiss her.

"Oh, Alan—the very best husband in all the universe, you are. None other could there be—like you."

She had just taken off her scarf again when suddenly I noticed a little speck in the sky ahead. It might have been a tiny bird, flying toward us from the plains below.

"Miela—look!"

She followed the direction of my hand. The speck grew rapidly larger.

"A girl, Alan," she said after a moment. "Let us wait."

We stood silent, watching. It was indeed a girl, flying over the valley some two or three hundred feet above the ground. As she came closer I saw her wings were blue, not red like Miela's. She came directly toward us.

Suddenly Miela gave a little cry.

"Anina! Anina!"

Without a word to me she spread her wings and flew up to meet the oncoming girl.

I stood in awe as I watched them. They met almost above me, and I could see them hovering with clasped hands while they touched cheeks in affectionate greeting. Then, releasing each other, they flew rapidly away together—smaller and smaller, until a turn in the valley hid them entirely from my sight.

I sat down abruptly. A lump was in my throat, a dismal lonesomeness in my heart. I knew Miela would return in a moment—that she had met some friend or relative—yet I could not suppress the vague feeling of sorrow and the knowledge of my own incapacity that swept over me.

For the first time then I wanted wings—wanted them myself—that I might join this wife I loved in her glorious freedom of the air. And I realized, too, for the first time, how that condition Miela so deplored on Mercury had come to pass. I could understand now very easily how it was that married women were deprived by their husbands of these wings which they themselves were denied by the Creator.

Hardly more than ten minutes had passed before I saw the two girls again flying toward me. They alighted a short distance away, and approached me, hand in hand.

The girl with Miela, I could see now, was somewhat shorter, even slighter of build, and two or three years younger. Her face held the same delicate, wistful beauty. The two girls strongly resembled one another in feature. The newcomer was dressed in similar fashion to Miela—sandals on her feet, and silken trousers of a silvery white, fastened at the ankles with golden cords.

Her wings, as I have said, were blue—a delight light blue that, as I afterward noticed, matched her eyes. Her hair was the color of spun gold; she wore it in two long, thick braids over her shoulders and fastened at the waist and knee. She was, in very truth, the most ethereal human being I had ever beheld. And—next to Miela—the most beautiful.

Miela pulled her forward, and she came on, blushing with the sweet shyness of a child. She was winding her silken silver scarf about her breast hastily, as best she could with her free hand.

"My sister, Anina—Alan," said Miela simply.

The girl stood undecided; then, evidently obeying Miela's swift words of instruction, she stood up on tiptoe, put her arms about my neck, and kissed me full on the lips.

Miela laughed gayly.

"You must love her very much, Alan. And she—your little sister—will love you, too. She is very sweet."

Then her face sobered suddenly.

"Tao has returned, Alan. And he has sent messengers to our city. They are appealing to our people to join Tao in his great conquest. They say Tao has here with him, on Mercury, a captive earth-man, with wonderful strength of body, who will help in the destruction of his own world!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTIVE EARTH-MAN.

AS we came out of the valley I had my first view of the Great City. It occupied a huge, mound-shaped circular mountain which rose alone out of the wide

plain that spread before me. As far as I could see extended a rich muddy soil partially covered with water. A road led out of the valley, stretching across these wet fields toward the base of the mountain. It was built on an embankment some eight or ten feet high, of the red, metallic ore of the mountains.

All along the base of this embankment, with their roots in the water, graceful trees like palms curved upward over the road. The landscape was dotted with these and other tropical trees; the scene was, indeed, essentially tropical.

I wondered at the continued absence of sight of human beings. The fields were quite evidently under cultivation. A rise of ground off to the left was ridged with terraces. As we passed on along the road I saw a rude form of plow standing where it had been left in a field which evidently was producing rice or something akin to it. Yet there was not a person in sight. Only ahead in the sky I could see a little cluster of black dots that Miela said was a group of females hovering about the summit of the Great City.

"It is the time of sleep now, Alan," she said, in answer to my question.

I had not thought of that. It was broad daylight, but here on Mercury there was no day or night, but always the same half light, as of a cloudy day.

The mountain on which the city was built was dotted thickly with palms, and as we approached I made out the houses of the city, set amid the trees, with broad streets converging at the top. As we came still closer I saw that the summit of the mountain was laid out like some beautiful tropical garden, with a broad, low-lying palace in its center.

When we were still a mile or so away from the outskirts of the city Miela spoke in her soft native tongue to Anina. The girl smiled at me in parting, and, unwinding the veil from about her breast, flew into the air.

We stood watching her as she winged her way onward toward the sleeping city. When she had dwindled to a tiny speck I sighed unconsciously and turned away; and again Miela smiled at me with comprehension.

We started forward, Miela chattering now like a little child. She seemed eager to tell me all about the new world of hers I was entering, and there was indeed so much to tell she was often at a loss what to describe first.

She named the cereal which constituted the only crop to which these marsh lands were suitable. From her description I made out it was similar to rice, only of a somewhat larger grain. It formed, she said, the staple article of food of the nation.

As we approached the base of the Great City mountain the ground began gradually rising. The drainage thus afforded made it constantly drier as we advanced. It assumed now more the character of a heavy loam.

Still farther on we began passing occasional houses—the outskirts of the city itself. They were square, single-story, ugly little buildings, built of reddish stone and clay, flat-roofed, and raised a foot or two off the ground on stone pilings. They had large rectangular windows, most of them open, a few with lattice shades. The doorways stood open without sign of a door; access to the ground was obtained by a narrow board incline.

Interspersed with these stone houses I saw many single-room shacks, loosely built of narrow boards from the palm trees, and thatched with straw. In these, Miela explained, lived poorer people, who worked in the rice fields for the small land owners.

We reached the base of the mountain proper, and I found myself in a broad street with houses on both sides. This street seemed to run directly to the summit of the mountain, sloping upward at a sharp angle. We turned into it and began our climb into the sleeping city. It was laid out regularly, all its principal streets running from the base of the mountain upward to its summit, where they converged in a large open space in which the castle I have already mentioned was situated. The cross-streets formed concentric rings about the mountain, at intervals of perhaps five hundred feet down its sides—small circles near the top, lengthening until at the base the distance around was, I should judge, ten miles or more.

We climbed upward nearly to the summit; then Miela turned into one of the cross-streets. I had found the climb tremendously tiring, though Miela seemed not to notice it unduly, and I was glad enough when we reached this street which girdled the mountain almost at the same level. We had gone only a short distance along it, however, when Miela paused before a house set somewhat back from the road on a terrace.

"My home," she said, and her voice trembled a little with emotion. "*Our* home it shall be now, Alan, with Lua and Anina, our mother and sister."

A low, bushy hedge separated the street from a garden that surrounded the house. The building was of stone, two stories in height. It was covered with a thick vine bearing a profusion of vivid red flowers. On its flat roof were tiny palm trees, a pergola with trellised vines, and still more flowers, most of them of the same brilliant red. The whole was surrounded by a waist-high parapet.

One corner of the roof was covered with thatch—a little nest where one might be sheltered from the rain, and in which I could see a bed of palm fiber. At one side of the house a tremendous cluster of bamboo curved upward and over the roof. A path of chopped coconut husks led from the street to a short flight of steps in the terrace at the front entrance.

We passed along this path and entered through the open doorway directly into what I judged was the living room of the dwelling. It was some thirty feet long and half as broad, with a high ceiling and stone floor. Its three windows fronted the garden we had just left; in its farther wall a low archway led into an adjoining room. The furniture consisted only of two or three small tables and several low, wide couches, all of bamboo.

A woman and the girl Anina rose as we entered. Anina ran toward us eagerly; the elder woman stood quietly waiting. She was about forty years of age, as tall as Miela, but heavier of build. She was dressed in loose silk trousers, gathered at waist and ankle; and a wide sash that covered her breast. Her hair was iron gray,

cut short at the base of the neck. From her shoulders I saw hanging a cloak that entirely covered her wings.

As she turned toward us I saw a serious, dignified, wholly patrician face, with large, kindly dark eyes, a high, intellectual forehead, and a firm yet sensitive mouth. She was the type of woman one would instinctively mark for leader.

Miela ran forward to greet her mother, falling upon her knees and touching her forehead to the elder woman's sandaled feet. As she rose I could see there were tears in the eyes of them both. Then Miela presented me. I stood for an instant, confused, not knowing quite what I should do.

Miela laughed her gay little laugh.

"Bow low, Alan—as I did—to our mother."

I knelt to her respectfully, and she put her hands lightly upon my head, speaking low words of greeting. Then, as I stood up again, I met her eyes and smiled an answer to the gentle smile on her lips. From that moment I felt almost as though she were my own mother, and I am sure she took me then into her heart as her son.

The introduction over, I turned toward one of the windows, leaving Miela to talk with her mother. Anina followed me, standing timidly by my side, with her big, curious eyes looking up into my face.

"You're a sweet, dear little sister," I said, "and I *am* going to love you very much."

I put my arm about her shoulders, and she smiled as though she understood me, yielding to my embrace with the ready friendship of a child. For some moments we stood together, looking out of the window and talking to each other with words that were quite unintelligible to us both. Then Miela suddenly called me.

"We shall eat now, Alan," she said, "for you are hungry, I know. And above there is water, that we may wash." Her face clouded as she went on: "Our mother has told me a little that has happened. It is very serious, Alan, as you shall hear. Tao, with his great news of your wonderful world, is very fast winning over our men to his cause. A revolt, there may be,

here in our own city—a revolution against our government, our king. We can only look to you now, my husband, to save our country from Tao as well as your own.”

The situation as I found it in the Light Country was, as Miela said, alarmingly serious. During the two years Tao had been in the Twilight Country, preparing for his attack upon the earth, his project had caused little stir among the Light Country people.

Its women were, at first, perturbed at this wanton attack upon the humanity of another world, but since the earth was such an unknown quantity, and the fact of its being inhabited at all was problematical, interest in the affair soon lagged. The government of the Light Country concerned itself not at all.

But now, upon Tao's return, the news of his venture, as told by the emissaries he sent to the Light Country, struck its people like a bombshell. These emissaries—all men—had come to the Great City, and, finding their presence tolerated by the authorities, had immediately started haranguing the people.

The men were inclined to listen, and many of them openly declared their sympathy with Tao. These, however, were for the most part of the poorer, more ignorant classes, or those more adventurous, less scrupulous individuals to whom the prospect of sudden riches appealed.

“Why doesn't your government just throw Tao's men out if they're causing so much trouble?” I asked. “They never should have been allowed in the country at all.”

Miela smiled sadly.

“That is so, my husband. That should have been done; but now it is too late. Our men would protect them now, declaring their right to stay here and speak. There might be bloodshed among our people, and that must not be.”

“Are they armed?” I asked.

She shook her head. “No one is armed with the light-ray. To carry it is a crime punishable by death, for the light is too destructive.”

“But Tao has it?”

“Tao has it, indeed, but he is not so

great a monster that he would use it against us.”

I was not so sure of that, and I said so. “You don't mean to tell me, Miela, that your government has allowed Tao to prepare all this destructive armament without itself arming?”

Again she shook her head. “We have been preparing, too, and all our young men can be called if occasion comes. But that must never be. It would be too terrible.”

Miela and I occupied, that first night on Mercury, a broad wooden bed built low to the floor, with a mattress of palm fiber. At first I could not sleep, but lay thinking over the many things she had told me. The light in the room, too, was strange. Lattice covered the windows, but it was like trying to sleep at midday; and the heat and heaviness of the air oppressed me. I dropped off finally, to be awakened by Miela's voice calling me to breakfast.

We sat down to the morning meal at a low table set with shining plates and goblets of copper, or whatever the metal was, and napery of silk. The rice formed our main article of food, with sugar, milk, and a beverage not unlike coffee. There was also a meat like beef, although more highly flavored, and a number of sickish sweet fruits of a kind entirely new to me, which I could do no more than taste.

We were served by a little maid whose darker skin and heavier features proclaimed her of another race—a native of the Fire Country, Miela told me. She was dressed in a brown tunic of heavy silk, reaching from waist to knee. Her thick black hair was cut to her shoulders.

On her left arm above the elbow was welded a broad band of copper inscribed with a mark to identify Lua as her owner, for she was a slave. Her torso was bare, except for a cloak like Lua's which hung from her shoulders in the back to cover her wings. By this I knew she could not fly.

It was not until some time afterward that I learned the reason for this covering of the clipped wings. The wing joints were severed just above the waist line. The feathers on the remaining upper portions

were clipped, but through disuse these feathers gradually dropped out entirely.

The flesh and muscle underneath was repulsive in appearance—for which reason it was always kept covered. Lua showed me her wings once—mere shrunken stumps of what had once been her most glorious possession. I did not wonder then that the women were ready to fight, almost, rather than part with them.

Difficulties of language made our conversation during the meal somewhat halting, although Miela acted as interpreter. Lua and Anina both expressed their immediate determination to learn English, and, with the same persistence that Miela had shown, they set aside nearly everything else to accomplish it.

We decided that we should see the king and arrange our future course of action. Whatever was to be done should be done at once—that we all agreed—for Tao's men were steadily gaining favor with a portion of the people, and we had no means of knowing what they would attempt to do.

"What will your people think of me?" I suddenly asked Miela.

"We have sent our king word that you are here," she answered, "and we have asked that he send a guard to take you to the castle this morning."

"A guard?"

She smiled. "It is better that the people see you first as a man of importance. You will go to the king under guard. Few will notice you. Then will he, our ruler, arrange that you are shown to the people as a great man—one who has come here to help us—one who is trusted and respected by our king. You see, my husband, the difference?"

I did, indeed, though I wondered a little how I should justify this exalted position which was being thrust upon me. After breakfast Lua and Anina busied themselves about the house, while Miela and I went to the rooftop to wait for the king's summons. From here I had my first really good view of the city at close range.

Miela's home sat upon a terrace, leveled off on the steep hillside; all the houses in the vicinity were similarly situated. Be-

hind us the mountain rose steeply; in front it dropped away, affording an extended view of the level, palm-dotted country below.

The slope of hillside rising abruptly behind us held another house just above the level of the rooftop we were on. As I sat there looking idly about I thought I saw a figure lurking near this higher building. I called Miela's attention to it—the obscure figure of a man standing against a huge palm trunk.

As we watched the figure stepped into plainer view. I saw then it *was* a man, evidently looking down at us. I stood up. There was no one else in sight except a woman on the roof of the other house holding an infant.

Something about the man's figure seemed vaguely familiar; my heart leaped suddenly.

"Miela," I whispered, "surely that—that is no one of your world."

Her hand clutched my arm tightly as the man stepped forward again and waved at us. I crossed the rooftop, Miela following. At my sudden motion the man hesitated, then seemed about to run. I hardly know what thoughts impelled me, but suddenly I shouted:

"Wait!"

At the sound of my voice he whirled around, stopped dead an instant, and then, with an answering call, came running down the hillside.

"The earth-man!" cried Miela. "The earth-man of Tao it must be."

We hurried down through the house and arrived at its back entrance. Coming toward us at a run across the garden was the man—unmistakably one of my own world.

My hurried glance showed me he was younger than I—a short, stocky, red-headed chap, dressed in dirty white duck trousers and a torn white linen shirt.

He came on at full speed.

"Hello!" I called.

He stopped abruptly. For an instant we stared at each other; then he grinned broadly.

"Well, I don't know who *you* are," he ejaculated, "but I want to say it certainly does me good to see you."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The Adventures of Peabody Smith

By WILLIAM J. FLYNN,
Former Chief, United States Secret Service,
and GEORGE BARTON.

I.—THE FLAW IN THE ALIBI.

PEABODY SMITH, during his service with the government, got his first big chance when the chief of the United States Secret Service called him into his private office in the Treasury Building in Washington, and gave him the assignment to run down the man, or men, who were flooding the country with counterfeit one-hundred-dollar bills. It was a big job. His reputation as a detective was on trial; the purity of the national currency was at stake, and millions of dollars were involved. He was not given the faintest clew except that the bogus money was being circulated in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York.

The instructions of the head of the service were compressed into four short words:

"Go and get 'em!"

Peabody Smith took the Congressional Limited for New York that night. A sort of intuition told him that the drama in which he was to be such a conspicuous figure was going to be enacted in that metropolis. On the way over he read the newspaper clippings that told of the awe and consternation in business circles over the success of the new counterfeits. He had imagination, and he could see the tragedy that lay behind the brief news stories of the bad bank notes. He knew the cashier of

one financial institution had committed suicide. Everywhere he could sense misery and unhappiness in the wake of these counterfeiters. The one consolation that came to him as he thought of the hard work that lay before him was the fact that the chief had given him Tim Burke as his assistant.

Peabody Smith was jocularly known among his colleagues as the Yankee Detective. He was born on Cape Cod, and never fully recovered from it. He was tall, lean and sinewy, and when he arose always seemed to go through the process of uncurling his legs. He was a combination of aristocrat and democrat. His first name came from one of the oldest families in New England, and his last one from one of the most numerous in the world. His hair was grayish, and there were crow's feet about his eyes. He had a face that was habitually sad, a melancholy face, the face of a funeral director, and yet he had the ability to keep the table in a roar.

When he smiled it lit up his whole countenance. It was as though some one had suddenly struck a light in a dark room. He had a deliberation in speech that was disconcerting to those who were not familiar with his mannerisms, and those inquiring gray eyes and that silent tongue had caused many a hardened criminal to confess. He drank English breakfast tea by the quart, and smoked Pittsburgh stogies by the bale. Josh Billings was his favorite author, and he regarded the phonetic spelling humorist as a greater philosopher than Ralph Waldo Emerson. Aside from these small things he may be said to have had no small vices.

Twenty-four hours after his arrival in New York he learned of two tradesmen who had been the victims of the hundred-dollar-note swindle. One was a jeweler on upper Fifth Avenue, and the other a tobaccoist on lower Broadway. In each case there had been a small purchase, and the customer had been given the change in perfectly good currency. Suspicion rested on a man and a woman who were stopping at the high-priced Hotel Fostorio. The register disclosed the names of Dwight Tompkins and Edna Tompkins. They had adjoining rooms on the twenty-first floor of the towering harbor of hospitality. Mr. Tompkins

was the first to return to the hotel that evening, and Peabody Smith, halting him in the lobby, engaged in a heart-to-heart conversation. Mr. Tompkins was a man of about forty, with a little black mustache, and he was perfectly groomed from head to foot.

"I certainly paid the cigar man with a hundred-dollar bill," he admitted with engaging frankness, "but I did not have the faintest suspicion that it was not good."

"Of course not," agreed Peabody Smith, "but as a matter of routine, I must ask you to take me to your room."

Tompkins made no difficulty about this, but he was manifestly disturbed over the incident as any man might well be. When they reached the twenty-first floor they found a little man with a bullet head and beady eyes waiting in front of the room door. It was Tim Burke, also of the United States Secret Service. Evidently Peabody Smith, while trusting Mr. Dwight Tompkins, was taking no chances. With Burke standing guard in the room, Smith quickly and expeditiously "frisked" the well-dressed guest. One result of this was the finding of a wallet containing ten one-hundred-dollar bills. They were all counterfeit. Also he opened a handbag belonging to Mr. Tompkins and found a plain, white envelope with seventeen other counterfeit hundred-dollar bills.

Dwight Tompkins was plainly annoyed, but he did not exhibit the slightest confusion or fear. He pulled out a silver-mounted case and passed cigars to his visitors. Also he invited them to have some refreshments from his private stock, an invitation that was politely declined.

"Obviously, gentlemen," he began, nonchalantly, "this requires explanation."

"Obviously," concurred Peabody without the slightest trace of sarcasm.

"I understand your duty and I realize my position," Tompkins continued, "and I will tell you the whole truth. I'm going to lay all my cards on the table, and I promise to abide by the result of the game. It may tax your credulity, but I can assure you that I am perfectly innocent of any intentional wrongdoing."

"Proceed," said Smith with the air of a man who dislikes long introductions.

"I am engaged in the printing and engraving business in Huntsville," said Tompkins, taking the hint, "and I came to New York for a double purpose—a vacation and a wedding tour. This adds slightly to my embarrassment; but I want to be perfectly straightforward with you, and I'm not going to hold anything back. I was only married a few days ago. Mrs. Tompkins is with me. It was not exactly an elopement, because I have known her for a long time, but the marriage is a secret so far as my friends and relatives are aware.

"On the afternoon before last as I was going from the elevator to the desk of the hotel the electric lights suddenly went up and I noticed a large white envelope in a corner of the corridor. I picked it up and found inside of it thirty one-hundred-dollar bills. Naturally, I was stunned for a moment. As soon as I recovered my self-possession I went to the desk and notified the clerk that I had picked up some money, and that if the owner would communicate with me and describe his property it would be returned."

"It was about dusk, I assume," commented Peabody.

"Just about. After that, not satisfied, I went to the office of the *Morning Gazette* and inserted an advertisement in the Lost and Found column, saying that if the owner would prove his property it would be restored immediately. I do not see that it was possible to do more than that."

"More could not be expected," conceded the detective.

"As a further proof of my truthfulness," continued Tompkins, "I can refer you to the editor of the local newspaper in my town, to the president of the national bank, to the officers of the Chamber of Commerce, or to any of the citizens of Huntsville."

II.

BEFORE another day had passed Peabody Smith made it his business to get into communication with nearly all of the persons named, and they verified all that had been stated by Dwight Tompkins. They went further than that. Two of the leading citizens of the town wired that if their

townsman was in difficulty they would cheerfully go his bail, or come to his rescue in any other way that might be suggested. The detective interviewed the hotel clerk, and he testified that their guest had informed him of the finding of the money. Finally Peabody Smith called at the office of the newspaper and found that the advertisement had been inserted in the Lost and Found column as described. In order to make assurance doubly sure, he asked for the original copy of the advertisement, and it was in the handwriting of Dwight Tompkins. And over it was the stamp of the newspaper office, showing the hour at which it had been handed in.

This was surely enough to satisfy any ordinary mortal of the innocence of Dwight Tompkins, but Peabody Smith mooned about the hotel, displaying neither elation nor dejection. His gray eyes were alternately puzzled and inquiring. He smoked one Pittsburgh stogie after another, and going into the dining room of the hostelry, he consumed unheard-of quantities of tea. The man was having a mental struggle, but finally he reached his conclusion, and he announced it to his assistant in a matter-of-fact way:

"Tim," he said, "I've decided to place Tompkins under arrest."

"What for?" asked the astonished Burke. "Because he's given you such a clean bill of health?"

"No," answered the other solemnly, "for psychological reasons."

The hard-headed one shrugged his shoulders.

"This gets my goat," he cried with characteristic frankness, "but I suppose it's always good policy to make an arrest when you're on a job. You get credit in the newspapers, even if you have no case."

Peabody Smith was staring intently at Tim Burke, but he did not hear what his assistant was saying. His mind was on the twenty-first floor of the Hotel Forstoria.

"Divide and conquer," he was murmuring. "Tim, we must separate the man and the woman. There isn't any other way to it!"

They took the elevator and were whisked skyward. Dwight Tompkins and Edna

Tompkins were in the little sitting room adjoining his apartment. They received the detectives with surprise, but politeness. Peabody looked directly at Tompkins, but Burke could scarcely keep his eyes from the little bit of femininity who gazed up at him in such a pathetic and appealing manner. She must have recognized them from the description that had been given her by the man, for she turned to Smith confidently:

"Dwight has just been telling me that he told you everything. It was the right thing to do, and I'm proud of him. But if we can help you to find the people that put out those horrid counterfeits we'll be glad to do so, won't we, Dwight?"

"Certainly, my dear," he smiled, "but Mr. Smith knows that."

Peabody ignored this conversation, and he turned to Dwight Tompkins with the air of a funeral director who is asking the members of the family to take final leave, and said:

"I'm sorry, Tompkins, but I'll have to arrest you."

The man stiffened.

"Arrest me—on what charge?"

The flicker of a smile played around the sad countenance of Peabody Smith.

"We won't prefer any charge. We'll just hold you, let us say, as a material witness."

Every trace of suavity left Tompkins.

"I'll be damned if I stand for such an outrage. I warn you, Smith, that you will do this thing at your peril!"

The detective spoke in even tones:

"You'd better gather up whatever things you would like to take to prison with you—we'll try to make it as pleasant for you as possible."

While all this was going on the little woman in the room was playing her part in the drama in pantomime fashion. At the first mention of arrest she became pale and started to her feet with a gasp. But she quickly subdued her emotions and sat quietly and listened to the crossfire of talk between the two men. Presently she picked up a copy of a popular magazine that lay on the table and began to turn the pages idly, all the while watching the two speakers from beneath half-closed eyes.

At one time she chanced to look on the printed page before her. The startled yet shrewd light which came into her eyes indicated that she had made a discovery. Quietly she turned down a corner of the page. Almost at the same moment she reached over and picked up a burnt match stick from an ash tray. Carelessly she made marks around part of the matter in the magazine. By this time Tompkins and Smith were standing facing one another like duelists. When the detective spoke it was in that regretful tone to which the other man was becoming accustomed.

"Of course," he was saying, "you are going to come with us without any resistance?"

The women advanced with an elegant gesture.

"If he must go, I want to go with him—it will kill me to be left here alone."

Peabody Smith gazed thoughtfully into her glistening eyes, which shone like those of a hurt animal.

"I'm afraid," he said finally, "that Mr. Tompkins will have to go alone. Let us hope that it may not be for long."

She fought back the unbidden tears and went over and kissed and embraced Tompkins. As he left between the two detectives she thrust the magazine into his hand.

"Here's something to read," she murmured with a catch in her voice, "and you will find me here waiting for you."

III.

It was after Dwight Tompkins had been placed under lock and key, and the two investigators were in their apartment that Tim Burke turned to his superior.

"I'm not on to your game, chief, but I should say that you are acting in a pretty high-handed fashion. You haven't a shred of evidence against that fellow, and even if you had he'd have the right to get out on bail. Under the law you couldn't lock him up."

Peabody stared at his assistant so long and so earnestly that it made Burke nervous. But finally the old man spoke, and his words were unanswerable.

"But he is locked up, isn't he?"

"That's all right," retorted the other, "but you know—"

"Tim, you're not well," was the irrelevant exclamation of the long, lean detective.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," was the solemn retort, "that you are the victim of a pair of bright eyes. I don't blame you a bit. I was that way at your age. But if you're going to work with me, you've got to pull yourself together."

It sounded very good to talk about work, but for the next three days Peabody Smith seemed to do everything but labor. He made his headquarters at the Fostoria Hotel, smoked fine cigars, attended the theater, and made himself comfortable generally. He bought all of the morning and evening newspapers and went through them religiously. On the Sunday after the arrest of Tompkins the bullet-headed assistant walked into Peabody Smith's room, only to find him almost buried under an avalanche of Sunday papers. The floor was covered with them, and sporting sections, comic supplements, feature pages and news sections were lying round as thick as the fabled leaves in Vallombrosa.

"Good morning, chief," exclaimed Tim Burke, trying hard to hide a feeling of annoyance over such seeming indolence in the midst of an important case.

"'Mornin'," replied Peabody without lifting his eyes from the paper in which his head was buried.

"Still improvin' your mind, I notice," chirped the other with badly concealed impatience.

"Yep," was the short response.

Tim sat down and waited. His own reading was limited to the sporting page, and he never could understand any one wading through hundreds of pages of the modern Sunday journal. He noticed that Peabody was on his last paper. Apparently he read them all from beginning to end. A person, one might say, who was a perfect glut-ton for news. He noticed that the old man was running his eyes in practiced style down the list of the want ads. He could not resist the little quip.

"Looking for a job as a detective?"

Peabody did not reply. He turned from

the "Help Wanted" columns to the death notices. Suddenly a loud chuckle came from his vicinity. He slowly uncurled his long legs and rose to his feet. He was actually smiling as he stood there holding the newspaper between his fingers. He walked over to the window and looked outside. It was raining cats and dogs, not to mention other animals.

"It's a fine day," said Peabody with solemn humor, "for a funeral."

"Say, boss," exclaimed Tim, "I'll laugh if you put me on to the joke."

"It no joke. Just cast your eyes over that notice," and as he spoke he thrust the newspaper into the hands of his assistant.

This is what Burke read:

HENDRICKS.—On the tenth instant, Thomas A. Hendricks, in the seventieth year of his life. Funeral at twilight this evening. Interment in the family lot at the Huntsville Cemetery. Friends and relatives are kindly requested to omit floral offerings.

While the young man was perusing these lines with wrinkled brow the detective had gone to the telephone and called up the lieutenant of the police station where Dwight Tompkins had been detained. He had some difficulty in getting the connection, but presently he was talking to the police official:

"Yes, yes, Tompkins is the name. Dwight Tompkins, the man I left with you a few days ago. You say that he has not been permitted to see any one? That's right. That's just what I wanted. Now you are to release him at five o'clock this afternoon. Yes, let him go without any explanation. I'll be responsible. Don't forget. At five o'clock sharp."

Tim Burke was looking at his Yankee friend as though he thought he had lost his senses. He handed him the newspaper.

"I've read the death notice. What about it?"

"Not much except that we are going to attend that funeral. It's too bad that floral offerings are forbidden. I'd like to take a wreath or the gates ajar, or something like that. But the wishes of the family will have to be observed."

"You've ordered the release of Tomp-

kins?" said Burke with a note of interrogation. "What was the use of locking him up in the first place?"

"The reasons were entirely psychological," replied Peabody, grinning in the most unabashed fashion. "I was making a test. It has been entirely successful."

It was four o'clock when the two men crowded into a taxicab, and the detective ordered the driver to run out to Huntsville. The greenback that was pressed into his hand assured them of speed. In less than an hour they had reached the town, and the chauffeur was skirting the old-fashioned cemetery on the edge of the little community. He was instructed to wait in a secluded spot, and then Peabody cautiously led his way toward a corner of a certain plot. It was apart from the graves, but the two men saw that the earth had been disturbed. They had scarcely noticed this when the *chug-chugging* of an automobile was heard in the distance. Peabody grabbed Tim by the arm and pulled him behind a tree.

"Keep out of sight," he whispered, "and don't breathe."

The machine came in view and halted near the section where the two detectives were hiding. A medium-sized man, with a cap pulled down over his eyes, and wearing green goggles, was driving. He got out of the car hurriedly and glanced around him quickly. His eyes lighted on the broken clay. He took off his goggles, placed them in his pocket and lifted his cap.

It was Dwight Tompkins!

Tim Burke made a movement as if to go for him, but Peabody Smith pulled him back with a grunt of anger. After that they remained there as immovable as statues. The newcomer went to his car and got out a spade. Then he took off his coat, and going over to the disturbed plot, began to dig. He worked hard and fast and he went deep. Tim Burke thought it was the queerest performance he had ever witnessed. Presently the spade that Tompkins was using struck some hard substance. He tossed the implement aside and went down on his hands and knees and reached into the grave. The next moment he was pulling out a metal box. He put it under his arm and started for the car.

"Now, Tim," exclaimed Peabody, "get that box before he gets away!"

They rushed simultaneously in the direction of the grave digger. When Tompkins looked up he was gazing into the muzzle of a revolver in the hand of the Secret Service man.

"Hands up!" exclaimed Peabody.

The order was obeyed, and before Tompkins realized what was going on, Tim Burke had slipped a pair of steel bracelets around his unresisting wrists. After the prisoner had been placed securely in the car, the detective opened the metal box. In it he found what he had expected—four fine plates used in the engraving of the Thomas A. Hendricks counterfeit one-hundred-dollar notes.

IV.

THAT night, for the second time, Dwight Tompkins slept in a prison cell, but in the adjoining compartment little Edna Tompkins wept as one who is without hope. It was when all of the evidence had been marshaled and the case was cinched that Tim ventured to ask Peabody Smith how he had got the clew that led to the solution of the mystery.

The old man, who was seated in a capacious arm chair, slowly uncurled his long legs, reached over for a fresh stogie, lit it and then resumed his former position.

"Well," he said as the smoke ascended in little ringlets, "it all came about through a flaw in the alibi."

"But," protested Tim, "I thought that was a beautiful alibi—it looked air-tight to me."

"Very true, sonny, but there was one tiny hole in it, and you know that is enough to sink a battleship. He had the background all right. He was in business in Huntsville and was respected by the people. But as an expert engraver, he was obsessed with the idea that he could beat the United States government at its own game. That, if you will pardon me for saying it, is a fatal mistake on the part of any man. Counterfeiters have been trying to rival the Bureau of Engraving and Printing for a hundred years, and they have always failed and always will fail.

"He told the truth when he said that he had notified the hotel clerk of the alleged finding of the bogus money. He was truthful when he told of inserting the advertisement in the newspaper. But it was there that the fatal flaw disclosed itself. He insisted that he picked up the envelope in the corridor of the hotel just as the electric lights were going on. The records of the electric light company showed me that the lights went on at six o'clock. And the 'ad' in the Lost and Found column was handed in at four forty-five that afternoon, one hour and a quarter before the money was said to have been found. The stamp of the business office on the copy proved that, and it is a well-known fact that this particular newspaper does not accept advertisements of that kind after five o'clock in the afternoon.

"I had caught Tompkins in a lie, and it was only necessary to be patient to land him in the net. What I wanted to get was the plates from which the bank notes were printed, and that took a little strategy. I was positive they would be hidden somewhere, and it was that which caused me to separate the man and the woman. If he was arrested, the business of hiding the plates would fall on her, and having done that she would try to communicate with him. I made sure that they could not see one another, and that no communications should reach him. Dwight and Edna both believed that it pays to advertise, and for that reason I directed that he should have the newspapers sent to him. I watched them, too, as you know, and when that clever Hendricks' death notice appeared I

knew that we had the plates from which the counterfeit notes were printed, for, as you know, each one of them contains a fine engraving of Vice President Thomas A. Hendricks."

Tim Burke was looking at his chief admiringly, but he was constrained to make one criticism.

"Don't you think you were a bit harsh with that little woman?"

The smile that overspread the countenance of Peabody Smith made him look like another man. He spoke with deliberation:

"Tim, I admire you for your misplaced gallantry, but I was on to the little lady from the start. When I arrested him you will recall that she handed him a magazine to while away the weary hours. Well, she had turned one of the pages and marked an article with a burnt match stick. I managed to get a peep at it. It was an essay on success, and it said: 'Speech is silver and silence is golden.' Many a man has talked himself to death.' A clever way to warn him to keep his mouth shut, but it was just what to expect from the woman who was the brains behind this whole scheme. He made the plates—she did the rest."

Peabody Smith relighted his stogie which had gone out while he was talking, and then he reached for a volume of his favorite author. But as Tim Burke left the room he flung a parting remark after him:

"The longer you are in the business, son, the more you will be convinced that crime does not pay. Old Josh Billings had the right dope when he declared that honesty was the best card in the pack."

Next Week: "THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY."

U U U

Next week a graphically told Complete Novelette of life in a railroad construction camp,

THE STORM WOMAN

BY JOHN HOLDEN

whose "The Drifter," published last year, exerted such a hold on his readers.



Caste

By W. A. FRASER

Author of "The Three Sapphires," "Thoroughbreds," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEAL OF HIS RAJ.

AS Barlow led the Gulab within the bungalow she drew, as a veil, a light silk scarf across her face.

Upon the floor of the front room a bearer, head buried in yards of pink cotton cloth—his *pugree*—lay fast asleep.

As Barlow raised a foot to touch the sleeper in the ribs the girl drew him back, put the tips of her fingers to her lips, and pointed toward the bedroom door.

Barlow shook his head, the flickering flame of the wick in an iron oil lamp that rested in a niche of the wall exaggerating to ferocity the frown that topped his eyes.

But Bootea pleaded with a mute salaam, and raising her lips to his ears, whispered:

"Not because of what is not permitted—not because of Bootea—please."

With an arm he swept back the beaded tendrils of a hanging door curtain, the girl glided to the darkness of the room, and Barlow, lifting from its niche the iron lamp, followed. Within, she pointed to the door that lay open, and Barlow, half in rebellion, softly closed it. As he turned he saw that she had dropped from their holding cords the heavy brocaded silk curtains of the window.

His limbs were numb from the long ride with the weight of the girl's body across his thighs; he was tired; he was mentally distressed over the messengers he had failed to locate, and this, the almost forced intrusion of Bootea into his bedroom, the closed door and the curtained windows, her do-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 14.

ing, was just another turn of the kaleidoscope with its bits of broken glass of a nightmare. He dropped wearily into a big, cane-bottomed Hindu chair, saying: "Little wilted rose, cuddle up on that divan among the cushions and rest, while you tell me why we sit in *pardah*."

The girl dragged a cushion from the divan, and placing it on the floor beside his chair, sat on it, curling her feet beneath her knees.

Barlow groaned inwardly. If his mind had not been so lethargic because of the things that weighted it, like the leaden soles upon a diver's boots, he would have roused himself to say: "Look here. A chap can't pull a girl who is as sweet as a flower and as trusting as a babe, out of trouble and then make bazaar love to her; he can't do it if he's any sort of a chap." All this was casually in his mind, but he let his tired eyes droop, and his hand that hung over the teakwood arm of the chair rested upon the girl's shoulder.

"Bootea will soon go so that the *sahib* may sleep, for he is tired," she said. "But first there is something to be said, and I have come close to the *sahib* because men not alone whisper in the dark, but they listen."

The hand that rested on Bootea's shoulder lifted to her cheek, and strong fingers caressed its oval.

"Would the *sahib* sleep, and would his mind rest if he knew where the two who rode are?"

Barlow sat bolt upright in the chair, roused, the lethargy gone, as if he had poured raw whisky down his throat. And he was glad; the closed door and the drawn curtains were not now things of debase-ment. Curious that he should care what this little Hindu maid was like, but he did. His hand now clasped the girl's wrist; it aimed not hurt in its tenseness.

"Yes, Gulab"—and he subdued his voice—"tell me if you know."

"They are dead upon the road beyond where you saved Bootea."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"It was too late, *sahib*; and if you had gone there they would have killed you."

"Who?"

"That I cannot tell,"

"You must, Gulab."

"No, Bootea will not."

Barlow stared angrily into the big eyes that were lifted to his, that, though they lingered in soft loving upon his face, told him that she would not tell, that she would die first, even as he would have given his life if he had been captured by tribesmen and asked to betray his fellowmen as the price of liberty.

He threw himself back wearily in the chair. "Why tell me this now—to mock me, to exult?" he said, reproach in his voice.

"But it is the message, *sahib*, that is more than the life of a sepoy, is it not?"

Again he sat up. "Why do you say this—do you know where it is?"

She drew from beneath her bodice the sandal soles, saying: "These are from the feet of the messenger who is dead. The one the *sahib* beat over the head with his pistol dropped them—and he was carrying them for a purpose. The *sahib* knows, perhaps, the secret way of this land."

In the girl's hand was clasped the knife from her girdle, and she tendered it, hilt first. "Bootea knows not if they are of value, the leather soles, but if the *sahib* would open them, then if there are eyes that watch the curtains are drawn."

Barlow revived, stimulated by hope, seized the knife and ran its sharp point around the stitching of the soles. Between the double leather of one lay a thin, strong parchmentlike paper.

He gave a cry of exultation as, unfolding it, he saw the seal of his raj. His cry was a gasp of relief. Almost the shattering of his career had lain in that worn, discolored sole, and disaster to his raj if it had fallen into the hands of the conspirators.

In an ecstasy of relief he sprang to his feet, and lifting Bootea, clasped her in his arms, smothering her face with kisses, whispering: "Gulab, you are my pre-server; you are the sweetest rose that ever bloomed!"

He felt the pound of her heart against his breast, and her eyes mirrored a happiness that caused him to realize that he was going too far—drifting into troubled waters that threatened destruction. The girl's

soul had risen to her eyes and looked out as though he were a god.

As if Bootea sensed the same impending evil, she pushed Barlow from her and sank back to the cushion, her face shedding its radiance.

Cursing himself for the impetuous outburst Barlow slumped into the chair.

"Gulab," he said presently, "my government gives reward for loyalty and service."

"Bootea has had full reward," the girl answered.

He continued: "We had talk on the road about the Pindaris; what did they who whisper in the dark say?"

"That the chief, Amir Khan, has gathered an army, and they fear that because of an English bribe he will attack the Mahrattas; so the Dewan has brought men from Karowlee to go into the camp of the Pindaris in disguise, and slay the chief for a reward."

This information, coming from Bootea, was astounding. Neither Resident Hodson nor Captain Barlow had suspected that there had been a leak.

"And was there talk of this message from the British to—" Barlow checked.

"To the *sahib*?" Bootea asked. "Not of the message; but it was whispered that one would go to the Pindari camp to talk with Amir Khan, and perhaps it was the *sahib* they meant. And perhaps they knew he waited for orders from the government."

Then suddenly it flashed upon Barlow that because of this he had been marked. The foul riding in the game of polo that so nearly put him out of commission—it had been deliberately foul, he knew that, but he had attributed it to a personal anger on the part of the Mahratta officer, bred of rivalry in the game and the fantastical hate of an individual Hindu for an Englishman.

"Now that a message has come will the *sahib* go to the Pindari camp?" Bootea persisted.

"Why do you ask, Gulab?"

"Not in the way of treachery, but because the *sahib* is now like a god; and because I may again be of service, for those who will slay Amir Khan will also slay the *sahib*."

"Gulab—"

Barlow's voice was drowned by yells of terror in the outer room.

"Thieves! Thieves have broken in to rob, and they have stolen my lamp! *Chowkidar, chowkidar!* Wake, son of a pig!"

It was the bearer, who, suddenly awakened by some noise, had in the dark groped for his lamp and found it missing.

"Heavens!" the captain exclaimed. "Now the cook house will be empty—the servants will come!" He rubbed a hand perplexedly over his forehead. "Quick, Gulab, you must hide!"

He swung open a wooden door between his room and a bedroom next. Within he said: "There's a bed, and you must sleep here till daylight, then I will have the *chowkidar* take you to where you wish to go. You couldn't go in the dark anyway. Bar the door; you will be quite safe. Don't be frightened." He touched her cheek with his fingers. "Salaam, little girl." Then, going out, he opened the door leading to the room of clamor, exclaiming angrily: "You fool, why do you scream in your dreams?"

"God be thanked! It is the *sahib*." The bearer flopped to his knees and put his hands in abasement upon his master's feet.

Jungwa had rushed into the room, staff in hand, at the outcry. Now he stood glowering indignantly upon the groveling bearer.

"It is the opium, *sahib*," he declared. "This fool spends all his time in the bazaar smoking with people of ill repute. If the Presence will but admonish him with the whip our slumbers will not again be disturbed."

The bearer, running true to the tenets of native servants, put up a flat denial.

"*Sahib*, you who are my father and my mother, be not angry, for I have not slept. I observed the *sahib* pass, but as he spoke not, I thought he had matters of import upon his mind and wished not to be disturbed."

"A liar—by Mother Gunga!" The *chowkidar* prodded him in the ribs with the end of his staff, and turning in disgust, passed out.

"Come, you fool!" Barlow commanded, returning to his room, and, sitting down wearily upon the bed, held up a leg.

The bearer knelt and in silence stripped the puttees from his master's limbs, unlaced the shoes, and pulled off the breeches.

When Barlow had slipped on the pyjamas handed him, he said: "Tell the *chowkidar* to come to me at his waking from the first call of the crows."

CHAPTER XIII.

DAMN THE THING!

ANomen of dire import all thugs believe is to hear the cry of a kite between midnight and dawn; to hear it before midnight does not matter, for the sleeper in turning over smothers the impending disaster beneath his body. But Captain Barlow had put up no such defense if evil hung over him, for when the *chowkidar* stood outside the door calling softly, "Captain Sahib! Captain Sahib!" Barlow lay just as he had flopped on the bed, his tiredness having held him as one dead.

Gently the soft voice of the *chowkidar* pulled him back out of his nirvana of non-existence, and he called sleepily, "What is it?"

"It is Jungwa," the watchman answered, "and I have received the *sahib's* order to come at this hour."

Then Barlow remembered. He swung his feet to the floor, saying: "Come!"

When the watchman had walked out of his sandals to approach in his bare feet, the captain said: "Is your tongue still to remain in your mouth, Jungwa, or has it been made sacrifice to the knife for the sin of telling in the cookhouse tales of your *ahib* and last night?"

"No, *sahib*, I have not spoken. I am a Meena of the Ossary *jat*. In Jaipur we guard the treasury and the zenanna of the rajah, and it is our chief who puts the *tika* upon the forehead of the Maharaja when he ascends to the throne. Think you then, *sahib*, that an Ossary would betray a trust?"

Barlow fixed the lean, saffron-hued face

with a searching look, and muttered: "Damned if I don't believe the old chap is straight! I think it is true," he said. "Shut the door." Then he continued: "The one who came last night is in the next room, and you must take her out through the bathroom door, for there is cover of the crotons and oleanders, and then to the road. Acquire a gharry and go with her to where she directs you."

"Salaam, *sahib*! Your servant will obey. and as to the *chota hazri, sahib*?"

"By Jove! Right you are, Jungwa," for Barlow had forgotten that—the little breakfast, as it was called.

Then he ran his fingers through his hair. To send the Gulab off without even a cup of tea was one thing; to admit the bearer to know of her presence was another.

The wily old watchman sensed what was passing in his master's mind, and he hazarded, diplomatically: "If the one is of high caste she will not eat what is brought by the bearer who is of the Sudra caste, but from the hands of a Meena none but the Brahmin *pundits* refuse food."

Barlow laughed; indeed the grizzled one had perception—he was an accomplice in the plot of secrecy.

"Good! Eggs and toast and tea. Demand plenty—say your *sahib* is hungry because of a long ride and nothing to eat. But hurry, I hear the 'seven sisters' (crows) calling to sleepers that the sun is here with its warmth."

Then the bearer entered, but Barlow ordered him away, saying, "Sit without till I call."

As he slipped into breeches and brown riding boots he cursed softly the entanglement that had thrust upon him this thing of ill flavor. Of course the watchman, even if he did keep his mouth shut, which would be a miracle in that land of bazaars gossip, would have but one opinion of why Boota had spent the night in the bungalow. But if Barlow squared this by speaking of a secret mission, that would be a knowledge that could be exchanged for gold. Perhaps not all servants were spies, but there were always spies among servants.

"Damn the thing!" he muttered, but he was helpless. The old man would give no

sign of what, no doubt, was in his mind; he would hold that leathery face in placid acquiescence in prevalent moral vagary.

Then he tapped lightly on the wooden door, calling softly, "Bootea! Bootea!"

When it was opened he said: "Food is coming, Gulab. A man of caste brings it, and it is but eggs from which no life has been taken, so you may eat. Then the *chowkidar* will go with you."

Jungwa brought the breakfast and put it down, saying, "I will wait, *sahib*, outside the bathroom door."

"Here is money—ten rupees for whatever is needed. Be courteous to the lady, for she is not a *nautchni*."

"The *sahib* would entertain none such," the *chowkidar* answered with a grave salaam.

"Damn the thing!" Barlow groaned.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHE'S THE KEYNOTE.

AN hour later Barlow, mounted on a stalky Cabuli polo pony, rode to the Residency, happy over the papers in his pocket, but troubling over how he could explain their possession, and keep the girl out of it. To even mention the Gulab, unless he fabricated a story, would let escape the night ride, and, no doubt, in the perversity of things, Resident Hodson would want to know where she was and where he had taken her, and insist on having her produced for an official inquisition. The Resident, a machine, would sacrifice a native woman without a tremor to the official gods.

Barlow could formulate no plausible method; he could not hide the death of the two native messengers, and would simply have to take the stand of "Here is this message from his excellency, and as to how I came by it is of as little importance as an order from the War Office regulating the color of thread that attaches buttons to a tunic."

He turned the Cabuli up the wide drive that led to the Residency, the big white walled bungalow in which Hodson lived, and shook his riding crop toward Elizabeth,

who was reading upon the veranda. He swung from the saddle, and held out his hand to the girl, saying cherrily, "Hello, Beth! Didn't you ride this morning, or are you back early?"

The novel seemed to require support of the girl's hand, or she had not observed that of the caller. Her face, always emotionless, was repellent in its composure as she said: "Father is just inside in his office with a native, and I fancy it's one of the usual dark things of mystery, for he asked me to sit here by the window that he might have both air and privacy. I'm to warn off all who might stand here against the wall with an open ear."

"I'll pull a chair up and chat with you till he's—"

"No, Captain Barlow." Barlow winced at this formality. "Father, I'm sure, wants you in this matter; in fact, I think a *chuprassi* is on his way now to your bungalow with the Resident's salaams."

"I'm ghastly tired, Beth. I'll come back to you," said Barlow.

"Yes, India is enervating," she commented in a flat tone.

Barlow had a curious impression that the girl's gray eyes had turned yellow as she made this observation.

"Ah, captain, glad you've come," Hodson said, rising and extending a hand across a flat-topped desk. "I'm—I'm—well, pull a chair. This is one Ajeet Singh," and he drooped slightly his thin, lean, bald head toward the Bagree chief, who stood stiff and erect, one arm in a sling.

At this Ajeet, knowing it for an informal introduction, put his hand to his forehead, and said, "Salaam, *sahib*."

"*Tutwar* play, sir, and an appeal for protection to the British, eh?" and Barlow indicated the arm in the sling.

Still speaking in English, Hodson said: "As to that"—he pursed his thin lips—"something dreadful has happened; this man has been mixed up in a decoity and has come for protection; he wants to turn approver."

"The usual thing. When these cut-throats are likely to be caught they turn Judas; to save their own necks they offer a sacrifice of their comrades."

"Yes," the Resident affirmed, "but I'm glad he came. Perhaps we had better just sit tight and let him go on—he's only nicely started. I've practically promised him that if what he confesses is of service to his excellency's government I will give him our conditional pardon, and use what influence I have with the Peshwa. But I fancy that old Baji Rao is mixed up in it himself."

He turned to the decoit: "Commence again, and tell the truth, and if I believe, you may be given protection from the British; but as to Sindhia, I have no power to protect his criminals."

The decoit cleared his throat and began: "I, Ajeet Singh, hold allegiance to the Rajah of Karowlee, and am chief of the Bagrees, who are decoits."

The Resident held up his hand. "Have patience." He rose, and took from a little cabinet a small alabaster figure of Kali which he placed upon the table, saying in English to Barlow, "When these decoits confess to be made approvers, half of the confession is lies; for to swear them on our Bible is as little use as playing a tin whistle. If he's a Bagree this is his goddess."

In Hindu he said: "Ajeet Singh, if you are a Bagree decoit you are in the protection of Bhowanee, and you make oath to her."

"Yes, *sahib*."

"This is Bhowanee—that is your name for Kali—and with obeisance to her make oath that you will tell the truth."

"Yes, *sahib*, it is the proper way."

"Proceed."

The jamadar, with the fingers of his two hands clasped to his forehead in obeisance, declared: "If I, Ajeet Singh, tell that which is not true, Mother Kali, may thy wrath fall upon me and my family."

Then Hodson shifted the black goddess and let it remain upon a corner of his table, surmising that the sight of it would help.

"Speak, now," the Resident commanded, and the jamadar proceeded.

"Dewan Sewlal sent to Rajah Karowlee for men for a mission, and whether it was in the letter he sent that thugs should come I know not, but in our party were thugs, and that led to why I am here."

"What is the difference, Ajeet?" Hodson asked sharply. "You are a decoit who kills, and thugs kill and rob; you are the disciples of this murderous creature, Kali."

"We who are decoits, while we make offerings to Kali, are not thugs. They have a chief mission of murder, while we have but a desire to gain for our families from the rich. The thugs came in this wise, *sahib*. Bhowanee created them from the sweat of her arms, and gave to them her tooth for a pick-ax, which is their emblem; a rib for a knife, and the hem of her garment for a noose to strangle. The hem of her sacred garment was yellow and white, and the *roomal* that they strangle with is yellow and white. They are thugs, *sahib*, and we are decoits."

"A fine distinction, sir," and Barlow laughed.

"Proceed," Hodson commanded.

"We were told by the Dewan to go to the camp of the Pindaris and bring back the head of Amir Khan."

"Lovely!" Barlow muttered softly; but Hodson started, a slight rouge crept over his pale face and he said: "By gad! this grows interesting, my dear captain."

"Absolutely Oriental," Barlow added.

Then when their voices had stilled Ajeet continued: "But Hunsah had ridden with the Pindari chief and he knew that he was well guarded, and that it would be impossible to bring his head in a basket, so we refused to go on this mission. The Dewan was angry and would not give us food or pay. Through Hunsah the Dewan sent word that we must obtain our living in the way of our profession, which is decoity."

"I wonder?" Barlow queried.

But Hodson, nodding his head, said: "Quite possible; and also quite probable that the dear avaricious Dewan would claim a share of the loot if it were of value, jewels especially." He addressed Ajeet: "I have nothing to do with this; I am not Sindhia."

"True, Sahib Bahadur, but a decoity was made upon a merchant on the road, and he and his men were killed, and also two English *sowars* were slain."

"By Heavens!" The cool, trained,

bloodless machine that was a British Resident at a court of intrigue, was startled out of his composure; his eyes flashed to those of Barlow.

But the captain, knowing all this beforehand, had an advantage, and he showed no sign of trepidation.

Then the thin, drawn face of the Resident was flattened out by control, and he commanded the decoit to talk on.

"I tried to save the two sepoys, and one was a sergeant, but I was stricken down with a wound, and it was in the way of treachery."

Ajeet laid a hand upon his wounded shoulder, saying, "When the two sepoys rode suddenly out of the night into our camp, where there in the moonlight lay the bodies of the merchant and his men, the Bagree were afraid lest the two should make report. They rushed upon the two riders, and it was then that I was wounded. I would have been killed but for this protection," and Ajeet rubbed affectionately the beautiful, strong shirt of mail that enwrapped his torso.

"And observe, *sahib*, the wound is from behind, which is a wound of treachery. As I rushed to the two and cried to them to be gone, a ball from a short gun in the hands of some Bagree smote me upon the shoulder, and this"—he again touched the shirt of mail—"and my shoulder blade turned it from my heart. Even then Hunsa thought I was dead. And he was in league with the Dewan to obtain for Nana Sahib a girl of my household, who is called the Gulab, because she is as beautiful as the moon."

At this statement Barlow knew why the man he had beaten with his pistol had tried to seize the Gulab. It was startling. The leg that had rested across a knee clamped noisily to the floor, and a smothered "Damn!" escaped from his lips. What a devilish complicated thing it was.

Ajeet resumed: "Hunsa rushed to where the Gulab was in hiding and helped the men who had been sent by Nana Sahib to steal her. Then he came back to our camp saying that many men had beaten him, and that he had been forced to flee."

At this vagary Barlow smiled.

"What of the two soldiers?" Hodson asked. "Why were they here in this land and at the camp of the Bagrees?"

"I know not, *sahib*."

"Were the bodies robbed by your men—they would be—did they find papers that would indicate the two were messengers?" and the Resident's bloodless fingers that clasped a pen were trembling with the suppression of the awful interest he strove to hide, for he knew, as well as Barlow, what their mission was.

"Yes, *sahib*, they were stripped and the bodies thrown in the pit with the others. Eight rupees were taken, but as to papers I know nothing."

"Where is the woman you call the Gulab?"

"She will be in the hands of Nana Sahib," Ajeet answered, "and because of that I have come to confess so your honor will save my life from him, for he will make accusation that I was the chief of those who killed the soldiers of the British; and that the *sahib* will cause to have returned to me the Gulab."

The Resident took from a drawer a form, and his pen scratched irritably at blanks here and there. He tossed it over to Barlow, saying, "I'm going to give this decoit this provisional pardon; perhaps it will nail him. What he has confessed is of value. You translate this to him while I think; I can't make mistakes—I must not."

Captain Barlow read to Ajeet the pardon, which was the form adopted by the British government to be issued to certain thugs and decoits who became spies, called approvers, for the British:

"You, Ajeet Singh, are promised exemption from the punishment of death and transportation beyond seas for all past offenses, and such reasonable indulgence as your services may seem to merit, and may be compatible with your safe custody on condition: first, that you make full confession of all the decoities in which you have been engaged. Second, that you mention truly the names of all your associates in these crimes, and assist to the utmost of your power in their arrest and conviction. If you act contrary to these conditions—conceal any of the circumstances of the decoities in which you have been engaged—screen any of your friends—attempt to escape—or accuse any innocent person—

you shall be considered to have forfeited thereby all claims to such exemption and indulgence."

When the captain had finished interpreting this the Resident passed it to the decoit, saying, "This will protect you from the British. You are now bound to the British; and I want you to bring me any papers that may have been found upon the two soldiers. Bring here this woman, the Gulab, if you can find her. Go now."

When Ajeet, with a deep salaam, had gone from the room Hodson threw himself back in his chair wearily and sighed. Then he said: "A woman! The jamadar was lying—all that stuff about Nana Sahib. There's been some deviltry; they've used this woman to trap the messengers; that's India. It's the papers they were after; they must have known they were coming, and they've hidden the woman. We've got to lay hands upon her, captain—she's the keynote."

CHAPTER XV.

"I CAN TRUST NO ONE."

BARLOW had waited until the decoit would have gone before showing the papers that were in his pocket, because it was an advantage that the enemy should think them lost. He was checked now as he put a hand in his pocket to produce them by the entrance of Elizabeth, and he fancied there was a sneer on her thin lips.

"Father," she said, as she leaned against the desk, one hand on its teakwood top, "I've been listening to the handsome leader of thieves; I couldn't help hearing him. I fancy that Captain Barlow could tell you just where this woman, the Gulab, who is as beautiful as the moon is. I'm sure he could bring her here—if he *would*."

The captain's fingers unclasped from the papers in his pocket, and now were beating a tattoo on his knee.

"Elizabeth!" the father gasped. "Do you know what you are saying?" His cold, gray eyes were wide with astonishment. "Did you hear all of Ajeet Singh's story?"

"Yes, all of it."

"It's your friend, Nana Sahib, whom you treat as if he were an Englishman and to be trusted, that knows where this woman is, Elizabeth."

A cynical laugh issued from the girl's lips that were so like her father's in their unsympathetic contour. "Yes, one may trust men, but a woman's eyes are given her to prevent disaster from this trust which is so natural to the deceivable sex."

"Elizabeth! You do not know what you are saying—what the inference would be."

"Ask Captain Barlow if he doesn't know all about the Gulab's movements."

The Resident pushed irritably some papers on his desk, and turning in his chair, asked, "Can you explain this, captain—what it is all about?"

There were ripples of low temperature chilling the base of Barlow's skull. "I can't explain it—it's beyond me," he answered doggedly.

The girl turned upon him with ferocity. "Don't lie, Captain Barlow. A British officer does not lie to his superior."

"Hush, Beth," the father pleaded.

"Don't you know, Captain Barlow," the girl demanded, "that this woman, the Gulab, is one who uses her beauty to betray men, even *sahibs*?"

"No, I don't know that, Miss Hodson. I saw her dance at Nana Sahib's, and I've heard Ajeet's statement. I don't know anything evil of the girl, and I don't believe it."

"A man's sense of honor where a woman is concerned—lie to protect her. I have no illusions about the *sahibs* in India," she continued, in a tone that was devilish in its cynicism, "but I did think that a British officer would put his duty to his king above the shielding of a *nautch* girl."

"Elizabeth!" Hodson rose and put a hand upon the girl's arm. "Do you realize that you are doing a dreadful thing—that you are impeaching Captain Barlow's honor as a soldier?"

Barlow's face was white, and Hodson was trembling, but the girl stood, a merciless, cold triumph in her face. "I do realize that, father. For the girl I care nothing, nor for Captain Barlow's intrigue with

such. But I am the daughter of the man who represents the British raj here."

Barlow, knowing the full deviltry of this high protestation, knowing that Elizabeth, imperious, dominating, cold-blooded, was knifing a supposed rival—a rival not in love, for he fancied Elizabeth was incapable of love—felt a surge of indignation.

"For God's sake, Elizabeth, what impossible thing has led you to believe that Captain Barlow has anything to do with this girl?" the father asked.

"I'll tell you; the matter is too grave for me to remain silent. This morning I rode early—earlier than usual, for I wanted to pick up the captain before he had started. As I turned my mount into his compound I saw, coming from the back of the bungalow, this native woman, and she was being taken away by his *chowkidar*. She had just come out some back door of the bungalow, for from the drive I could see the open space that lay between the bungalow and the servants' quarters."

Hodson dropped a hand to the teakwood desk; it looked inadequate, thin, bloodless; blue veins mapped its white back. "You are mistaken, Elizabeth, I'm sure—"

"No, father, I was not mistaken. There are not many native girls like the Gulab, I'll admit. As she turned a clump of crotons she saw me sitting my horse and drew a gauze scarf across her face to hide it. I waited, and asked the *chowkidar* if it were his daughter, and the old fool said it was the wife of his son; and the girl that he claimed was his son's wife had the iron bracelet of a Hindu widow on her arm. And the Gulab wears one—I saw it the night she danced."

A ghastly hush fell upon the three. Barlow was moaning inwardly, "Poor Bootea!" Hodson, fingers pressed to both temples, was trying to think this was all the mistaken outburst of an angry woman. The strong-faced, honest, fearless soldier sitting in the chair could not be a traitor—*could not be*.

Suddenly something went awry in the inflamed chambers of Elizabeth's mind, as if an electric current had been abruptly shut off. She hesitated; she had meant to say more, but there was a staggering vacuity.

With an effort she grasped a wavering thing of tangibility, and said, "I'm going now, father, to give the keys to the butler for breakfast. You can question Captain Barlow."

Elizabeth turned and left the room. Her feet were like dependents, servants, that she had to direct to carry her on her way. She did not call to the butler, but went to her room, closed the door, flung herself on the bed, face downward, and sobbed. Tears that scalded splashed her cheeks, and she beat passionately with clenched fist at the pillow, beating, as she knew, at her heart. It was incredible, this thing, her feelings.

"I don't care—I don't care—I never did!" she gasped.

But she did, and only now knew it.

"I was right—I'm glad—I'd say it again!"

But she would not, and she knew it. She knew that Barlow could not be a traitor; she knew it; it was just a battered new love asserting itself.

And below in the room the two men for a little sat not speaking of the ghoulis thing. Barlow had drawn the papers from his pocket; he passed them silently across the table.

Hodson, almost mechanically, had stretched a hand for them, and when they were opened, and he saw the seal, and realized what they were, some curious guttural sound issued from his lips as if he had waked in affright from a nightmare. He pulled a drawer of the desk open, took out a cheroot, and lighted it. Then he commenced to speak, slowly, droppingly, as one speaks who has suddenly been detected in a crime. He put a flat hand on the papers, holding them to the desk. And it was Elizabeth he spoke of at first, as if the thing under his palm, that meant danger to an empire, was subservient.

"Barlow, my boy," he said, "I'm old; I'm tired."

The captain, looking into the drawn face, had a curious feeling that Hodson was at least a hundred. There was a floaty wonderment in his mind why the fifty-five-years' service retirement rule had not been enforced in the colonel's case. Then he heard the other's words.

"I've had but two gods, Barlow—the British raj and Elizabeth; that's since her mother died. In a little, a few years more, I will retire with just enough to live on plus my pension—perhaps in France where it's cheap. And then I'll still have two gods—Elizabeth and the one God. And, captain, somehow I had hoped that you and Elizabeth would hit it off, but I'm afraid she's made a mistake."

Barlow had been following this with half his receptivity, for, though he fought against it, the memory of Bootea—gentle, trusting, radiating love, warmth—cried out against the bitter unfemininity of the girl who had stabbed his honor and his cleanness. The black figure of Kali still rested on the table, and somehow the evil lines in the face of the goddess suggested the vindictiveness that had played about the thin lips of his accuser.

And the very plea the father was making was reacting. It was this, that he, Barlow, was rich, that a chance death or two would make him Lord Barradean, was the attraction—not love. A girl couldn't be in love with a man and strive to break him.

Hodson had taken up the papers, and was again scanning them mistily.

"They were on the murdered messenger—he was killed, wasn't he. Barlow?"

"Yes."

"And has any native seen these papers, captain?"

"No. I cut them from the soles of the sandals the messenger wore myself, sir."

"That is all, then, captain. We have them back—I may say, thank God!" He stood up, and holding out his hand, added, "Thank you, captain. I don't want to know anything about the matter—I'm too much machine now to measure rainbows—fancy I should wear a strip of red tape as a tie."

"If you will listen, sir—there is another matter that I want to put right. Your daughter *did* see the Gulab, but because she had brought me the sandals. And you can take an officer's word for it that the Gulab is not what Elizabeth believes."

"Captain, I have lived a long time in India, too long to be led away by quick impressions, as unfortunately Elizabeth was.

I've outlived my prejudices. When the *mkhwa* tree blooms I can take glorious pleasure from its gorgeous fragrant flowers and not quarrel with its leafless limbs. When the pipal and the neem glisten with star flowers and sweeten the fetid night air, it matters nothing to me that the natives believe evil gods home in the branches. I know that even a cobra tries to get out of my way if I'll let him, and I know that the natives have beauty in their natures—one gets to almost love them as children. So, my dear captain, when you tell me that the Gulab rendered you and me and the British raj this tremendous service, and add, quite unnecessarily, that she's a good girl, I believe it all; we need never bring it up again. Elizabeth has just made a mistake. And, Barlow, men are always forgiving mistakes of women where their feelings are concerned—they must—that is one of the proofs of their strength. But these"—and he patted the papers lovingly—"well, they are rather like a reprieve brought at the eleventh hour to a man who is to be executed. We're put in a difficult position, though. To pass over in silence the killing of two soldiers would end only in the House of Commons; somebody would rise in his place and want to know why it had been hushed up. But to take action, to create a stir, would give rise to a suspicion of the existence of this."

Hodson rose from his chair and paced the floor, one hand clasped to his forehead, his small gray eyes carrying a dream-look as though he were seeking an occult enlightenment; then he sat down wearily, and spoke as if interpreting something that had been whispered him.

"Yes, Barlow, this decoit has been seized by the Nana Sahib lot. His life was forfeit, and they've offered him his life back to come here and turn approver—to become a spy, not *for* us, but as a spy *on* us for them. Ajeet would know that information of his coming to me would be carried to them by spies—the spies are always with me—and his life wouldn't be worth two annas. I gave him that pardon because we have no power to seize him here, but it will make them think that we have fallen into the trap. They might even be-

lieve—wily and suspicious as they are—that what he gleans here is the truth.

"There's a curious efficacy, Barlow, in what I might call an affectation of simplicity. You know those stupid heavy-headed crocodiles in that big pool of the Nerbudda below the marble gorge, and how they'll take nearly an hour wallowing and sidling up to a mud bank before they crawl out to bask in the sun; but just show the tip of your helmet above a rock and they're gone. That's perhaps what I mean. As we might say back in dear old London, this wily Rajput thinks he has pulled my leg."

"I think, colonel, that you are dead onto his wicket."

"Well, then, the thing to do is to emulate the *mugger*. But this"—Hodson lifted the paper and he grew crisp, incisive, his gray eyes blued like temper purpling polished steel—"we've got to act—they've got to be delivered, and soon."

"I am ready, sir."

"It's a most dangerous mission."

"Pardon, sir?"

"Sorry, captain. I was just thinking aloud—musing; forgive me. Perhaps when one likes a young man he lets the paternal spirit come in where it doesn't belong. I'm sorry. There's a trusty Patan here who could go with you," Hodson continued, "and this side of his own border he is absolutely to be trusted. I have my doubts if any Patan can be relied upon by us across the border."

"I will go alone," Barlow said quietly. Then his strong, white teeth showed in a smile. "You know the Moslem saying, colonel, that ten dervishes can sleep on one blanket, but a kingdom can only hold one king. I don't mean about the honor of it, but it will be easier for me. I went alone through the Maris tribe when we wanted to know what the trouble was that threatened up above the Bolan, and I had no difficulty. You know, sir, the playful name the chaps have given me for years?"

"Yes—the 'Patan'—I've heard it."

"I make a good Musselman—scarce need any make-up, I'm so dark; I can rattle off the *namaz*—daily prayer—and sing the *moonakib*—the hymn of the followers of the prophet."

"Yes," Hodson said, his words coming slowly out of a deep think, "there will be Patans in the Pindari camp; in fact, Pindari is an all-embracing name, having little of nationality about it. Rajputs, Bundoolas, Patans, men of Oudh, Sindies—men who have the lust of battle and loot, all flock to the Pindari chief. Yes, it's a good idea, captain, the disguise: not only for an unnoticed entrance to the camp, but to escape a waylaying by Nana Sahib's cutthroats."

"Yes, colonel, from what I have learned—from the Gulab, it was, sir—the Dewan has an inkling that I am going on a mission; and if I rode as myself the king might lose an officer, and officers cost pounds in the making."

The Resident toyed with the papers on his desk, his brow wrinkled from a debate going on behind it. He rose, and grasping the black Kali, carried it back to the cabinet, saying, "That devilish thing, so suggestive of what we are always up against here, makes me shiver."

Then he sat down, adding, "Captain, there is another important matter connected with this. The Rana of Udaipur is being stripped of every rupee by Holkar and Sindhia; they take turn about at him. Holkar is up there now, where we have chased him—threatened to sack Udaipur unless he were paid seventy *lacs*—seven million rupees—the accursed thief! We have managed to get an envoy to the Rana with a view to having him, and the other smaller rulers of Mewar, join forces with us to crush forever the Mahratta power—drive them out of Mewar for all time. The Rajputs are a brave lot—men of high thought, and it is too bad to have these accursed cutthroats bleeding to death such a race. If the Rana would sign this paper also as an assurance of friendship, to be shown the Pindari chief, it would help greatly."

"I understand, colonel. You wish me to get that from the Rana?"

"Yes, captain; and I may say that if you can get through with all this there will be no question about your majority; you might even go higher up than major."

"By Jove! As to that, my dear colonel, this trip is just good sport—I love it. Less danger than playing polo with these rotters."

I'll swing over to Udaipur first—it's just west of the Pindari camp—been there once before on a little pow-wow—then I'll switch back to Amir Khan."

"I wish you luck, captain, but be careful. If we can feel sure that this horde of Pindaris are not hovering on our army's flank, like the Russians hovered on Napoleon's in the Moscow affair, it will be a great thing—you will have accomplished a wonderful thing."

"Right you are, sir!" Barlow exclaimed blithely. The stupendous task, for it was that, tonic'd him; he was like a sportsman that had received news of a tiger within killing distance. He rose, and stretched out his hand for the paper, saying, "I've got a job of cobbling to do—I'll put this between the soles of my sandal, as it was carried before—it's the safest place, really. To-morrow I'll become an apostate, an Afghan; and I'll be busy, for I've got to do it all myself. I can trust no one with a dark skin."

"Not even the Gulab, I fear, captain; no one ever knows when a woman will be swayed by some mental transition." He was thinking of Elizabeth.

"You're right, colonel," Barlow answered. "I fancy I could trust the Gulab—but I won't."

CHAPTER XVI.

"IT IS BOOTEH, SAHIB."

CAPTAIN BARLOW had been through a busy day. The very fact that all he did in preparation for his journey to the Pindari camp had been done with his own hands, held under water, out of sight, had increased the strain upon him.

In India in the usual routine of matters, a staff of ten servants form a composite second self to a *sahib*—to hand him his boots, and lace them; to lay out his clothes, and hold them while slipped into; to bring a cheroot, or a peg of whisky; a *syce* to bring the horse and rub a towel over the saddle—to hold the stirrup, even, for the lifted foot, and trotting behind, guard the horse when the *sahib* makes a call; a man to go here and there with a note or to post

a letter; a servant to whisk away a plate and replenish the crystal glass with pearl-beaded wine without sign from the drinker, and appear like a bidden ghost, clad in speckless white, silent and impassive of face, behind his master's chair at the table when he dines out—everything, in fact, beyond the mental whirl of the brain to be arranged by one or other of the ten.

But this day Barlow had been like a man throwing detectives off his trail. Not one of his servants must suspect that he contemplated a *rip*—no, not just that, for the captain had intimated casually to the butler that he would go soon to Satara.

Thus it had been arranged secretly that he would ride from his bungalow as Captain Barlow, and leave the city as Ayub Ali, an Afghan.

Perhaps Barlow was overtired, that curious knotted condition of the nerves through overstrain that rasps a man's mental fiber beyond the narcotic of sleep, and yet holds him in a hectic state of half unconsciousness. He counted camels—long strings of bubbling, complaining beasts, short legged, stout, shaggy desert ships, such as merchants of Kabul used to carry their dried fruits—figs and dates and pomegranates, and the wondrous flavored Sirdar melon—wending across the Sind desert of floating white sand to Rajasthan.

Once a male, tickled to frenzy by the caress of a female's velvet lips upon his rump, with a hoarse bubbling scream, wheeled suddenly, snapping the thin lead cord that reached from the tail of the camel in front to the button in his nostril, and charged the lady in an exuberance of affection with a full broadside thrust from his chest that bowled her over, where she lay among the fragments of two huge, broken, burned clay *gumlas*, that, filled with water, had been lashed to her sides.

Barlow sat up at this startling tumult that was the outcome of his slipping a little into slumber. He threw his head back on the pillow with a smothered "Damn!"

His bed had creaked, and an answering echo as if something had slipped or slid, perhaps the sole of a bare foot on the fibrous floor matting at the window, fell upon his senses. Turning his face toward

the sound he waited, eyes trying to pierce the gloom, and ear attuned. He almost cried out in alarm as something floated through the dark from the window and fell with a soft thud upon his face. He brushed at the something—perhaps a bat, or a lizard or a snake—with his hand and received a sharp prick, a little dart of pain in a thumb. He sprang from the bed, lighted the wick that floated in the iron lamp, and discovered that the thing of dread was a rose, its petals red against the white sheet.

He knew who must have thrown the rose, and almost wished that it had been a chance missile, even a snake, but he put the lamp down, passed into the bathroom, and unbarring the wooden door, called softly, "Who is it?"

From the cover of an oleander a slight girlish form rose up and came to the door, saying, "It is Bootea, *sahib*; do not be angry. There is something to be said."

By the arm he led her within, and bidding her wait, passed to the bedroom and drew the heavy curtains of the windows. Then he went through the drawing-room and out to the veranda, where the watchman lay asleep on his roped charpoy. Barlow woke him. "There's a thief prowling about the bungalow. Do not sleep till I give you permission. See that no one enters," he commanded.

He went back to his room, closed and barred the door, and told Bootea to come.

When the girl entered he said: "You should not have come here; there are eyes, and ears, and evil tongues."

"That is true, *sahib*, but also death is evil—sometimes. I have brought this to the *sahib*," Bootea said, as she drew a paper from her breast and passed it to the captain. It was the pardon the Resident had given that morning to Ajeet Singh.

Barlow, though startled, schooled his voice to an even tone as he asked, "Where did you get this—where is Ajeet?"

"As to the paper, *sahib*, what matters how Bootea came by it; as to Ajeet, he is in the grasp of the Dewan, who learned that he had been to the Resident in the way of treachery."

"Ajeet thought Nana Sahib had stolen you, Bootea."

"Yes, *sahib*, for he did not find me when he went to the camp, and I did not go there. But now he would betray the *sahibs*—that is why I have brought back the paper of protection."

"Will they kill Ajeet?" Barlow asked.

"I will tell the *sahib* what is," the girl answered, drawing her *sari* over her curled in feet, and leaning one arm on Barlow's chair. "The decoity that was committed last night was, as Ajeet feared, because of treachery on the part of the Dewan. I will tell it all, though it might be thought a treachery to the decoits. As to being false to one's own clan, Ajeet is, because he is a Bagree—but I am not."

Barlow pondered over this statement. The girl had mystified him—that is as to her breeding. Sometimes she spoke in the first person and again in the third person, like so many natives, as if her language had been picked up colloquially. But then the use of the third person when she used Bootea instead of a nominative pronoun might be due to a cultured deference toward a *sahib*.

"I thought you were not of these people—you are of high caste, Bootea," he said presently.

He heard the girl gasp, and looking quickly into her eyes, saw that they were staring as if in fright.

For a space of a few seconds she did not answer; then she spoke, and Barlow felt her voice was being held under control by force of will. "I am Bootea, one in the care of Ajeet Singh. That is the present, *sahib*, and the past—" She touched the iron bracelet on her arm, and looked into Barlow's eyes as if she asked him to bury the past.

"Sorry, girl—forgive me," he said.

"Ajeet has told why the men were brought—for what purpose?"

"Yes, Gulab—to kill Amir Khan."

"And when they refused to go on this mission, the Dewan, to get them in his power, connived with Hunsa to make the decoity so that their lives would be forfeit; then if the Dewan punished them for not going the Rajah of Karowlee could not make trouble. Hunsa told the Dewan that if I were sent to dance before Amir Khan,

some of the men going as musicians and actors, the chief would fall in love with me, and that I could betray him to those who would kill him; that he would come to my tent at night unobserved—because he has a wife with him—and that Hunsa would creep into the tent and kill him as he slept; then we would escape."

Barlow sprang to his feet and paced the floor; then he plumped into the chair again, saying, "What an unholy scheme, even for India. Gad! How I wish I'd killed the brute when I had the chance."

"I did not know that Hunsa had proposed this, neither did Ajeet, for they wanted to get him in their power through the decoity, so that if he refused permission he might be killed. And now Ajeet is trapped through the decoity, and Bootea is going to the Pindari camp."

"You're not going to betray Amir Khan, have him murdered?" Barlow cried, aghast at the villainy, at the thought that one so sweet could be forced to complicity in such a ghastly crime.

"No, *sahib*, to save his life, for if I do not go now Ajeet will be killed, and all the others put in prison because of the decoity. Worse will happen Bootea—she will be placed in the *seraglio* of Nana Sahib."

"Damn it! They can't do that!" Barlow exclaimed angrily. "I'll stop that."

"No, the *sahib* can't; and he has a mission. He is not of the service of protecting Bootea."

"You can't save Amir Khan's life unless you betray the Bagrees to him?"

"Yes, *sahib*, I can. Perhaps the chief will like Bootea, and will listen to what she says. Men such as brave warriors always treat Bootea not as a *nautchni*, so I will ask him not to come to my tent at night because of ill repute. Hunsa will not be able to slay him unless it is a trap on my part to get him from the watching eyes of his men. If Hunsa becomes suspicious, and there is real danger, I will threaten that I will expose him to the chief. If we come back because we have failed in our mission, having tried to succeed, it will not be like refusing to go; and perhaps there will be mercy shown."

"Mercy!" Barlow sneered. "Nana

Sahib knows nothing of mercy. He's a tiger."

"But if I refuse to go another *nautchni* will be sent, perhaps more beautiful than I am, and she would betray the chief, and perhaps all would be killed."

"By Jove! You're some woman, you're magnificent—you're like a Rajputni princess."

A slim hand was placed on Barlow's wrist and the girl said, "*Sahib*, I am just Bootea—please, please!"

"And that's your reason for taking this awful chance, to save Ajeet and the others, is it?"

"There is another reason, *sahib*." The girl dropped her eyes, and turning a gold bangle on her wrist gazed upon a ruby that had the contour of a serpent's head. Presently she asked, "Will the *sahib* go to Khureyra and have a knife thrust between his ribs?"

Barlow was startled by this query. "Why should I go to Khureyra, Gulab?"

"To see Amir Khan."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because it is known. But the chief is not now there—he has taken his horsemen to Saugor."

Again this was startling. Also the information was of great value. If the Pindari horde had left the territory of Sindhia and crossed the border into Saugor they were closer to the British.

Barlow patted the girl's hand, saying, "My salaams to you, little girl."

He felt her slim, cool fingers press his hand, but he shrank from the claiming touch, muttering, "The damned barrier!"

Suddenly Barlow remembered Bootea had spoken of another reason for going to the Pindari camp. He puzzled over this a little, hesitating to question her. She had not told him what it was, but had asked if he were going there; the reason evidently had something to do with him. It couldn't be treachery—she had done so much for him; it must be the something that looked out of her eyes when they rested on his face, the unworded greatest thing on earth in the way of fealty and devotion. Possibly this was the grand motive, the reason she had given being secondary.

You said, Gulab, that you had another reason for this awful trip; what is it?" he asked.

The girl's eyes dropped to the ruby bracelet again. "To acquire merit in the eyes of Mahadeo, *sahib*."

"To do good acts so that you may be reincarnated as a heaven-born, a Brahmini, perhaps even come back as a *memsahib*, Gulab?"

At this her big eyes rose to Barlow's face, and he could swear that there were tears misting them; and sensing that if she had fallen in love with him, what he had said about her becoming a *memsahib* had hurt. Perhaps she realized, as he did, that that was the barred door to happiness—that she wasn't of the white race.

"Yes, *sahib*," she said presently. "A Swami told me that in a former life I had been evil."

"The Swami is an awful liar!" Barlow ejaculated.

"The holy ones speak the truth, *sahib*. The Swami said that because of having been beautiful I had caused deaths through jealousy."

"Oh, the crazy fool!" Barlow declared in English, "and it's all rot! This is the reason you spoke of, Gulab—good deeds; is it the only other reason?"

The girl turned her face away, and Barlow saw her shoulders quiver.

He rose from the chair, and lifting the girl to her feet, held her in his arms, saying: "Look me in the eyes, Gulab, and tell me if you are going through this devilish thing because of me."

"Bootea is going to the camp of Amir Khan because Hunsu and the others have been told to kill the *sahib*; and she will see that this is not accomplished."

Barlow clasped the girl to his breast and smothered her face in kisses. "You are the sweetest little woman that ever lived," he said, "and I am a sinner, for this can only bring you misery."

"*Sahib*—it can't be, but it is not misery. The sweet pain has been put in the heart of Bootea by the *sahib*'s eyes, and she is happy. But do not go as a *sahib*."

Barlow cursed softly to himself, muttering, "India! Even dreams are not un-

heard!" Then—"What made you say that?" he queried.

"It is known because that is the way of the *sahib*. He knows that where he sleeps or eats, or plays games with the little balls that there are always servants, and it is known that Captain Barlow is called the Patan by his friends."

"St. George and the Cross!" he ejaculated. And then he added: "If I went thus would they know me?"

"There would be danger, but the *sahib*, knowing of this, could take more care in the way of deceit. But Bootea will know—the eyes will not be hidden."

Then he thought of Hunsu, and asked, "But aren't you afraid to go with that beast Hunsu?"

The girl laughed. "The decoits have orders from the Dewan to kill him if I complain of him; but if they do not he is promised the torture when he comes back if I make complaint. If the *sahib* will but wait a few days before the journey so that Bootea has made friends with Amir Khan before he comes, it will be better. We will start in two days."

"I'll see, Gulab," he answered evasively. "You are going now?"

"Yes, *sahib*, it has been said."

"Not alone, Gulab. I'll send the door-man with you."

"No, Bootea will be better alone." She touched the knife in her sash. "It must not be known that Bootea came to the *sahib*."

Barlow took her arm leading her through the bathroom to the back door. He opened it, and listened intently for a few seconds. Then he took her oval face in his palms and kissed her passionately, saying, "Good-by, little girl; God be with you. You are sweet."

"The *sahib* is like a god to Bootea," she whispered.

As the girl slipped away between the bushes, like something floating out of a dream, Barlow stood at the open door, a resurgence of abasement flooding his soul. In the combat between his mentality and his heart the heart was making him a weakling, a dishonorable weakling, so it seemed. He pulled the door shut, and went back to his

bed and finally fell asleep, a thing of tortured unrest.

CHAPTER XVII.

"DEMAND THESE MURDERERS!"

BARLOW was up early next morning, wakened by that universal alarm clock in India—the gray-necked, small-bodied, city crow whose tribe is called the Seven Sisters—noisy, impudent, clamorous, sharp-eyed thieves that throng the compounds like sparrows, that hop in through the open window and steal a slice of toast from beside the cup of tea at the bedside.

He mounted the waiting Cabuli pony and rode to the Residency. He had much to talk over with Hodson in the light of all that had transpired in the last two days, and, also, he had a hope that Elizabeth would be possessed of an after-the-storm calm, would greet him, and somehow give him a moral sustaining against his lapse in heart loyalty. Mentally he didn't label his feeling toward Elizabeth love. Toward her it had been largely a matter of drifting, undoubted giving in to suasion, more of association than what was said. She had class; she was intellectual; there was no doubt about her wit—it was like a well-cut diamond—sparkling, brilliant, no warmth. When Barlow reflected, jogging along on the Cabuli, that he probably did not love Elizabeth, picturing the passion as typified by *Romeo* and *Juliet* as instance, he suddenly asked himself: "By Jove! And does anybody except the pater love Elizabeth?" He was doubtful if anybody did. All the servants held her in esteem, for she was just, and not niggardly; but hers was certainly not a disposition to cause spontaneous affection. Perhaps the word admirable epitomized Elizabeth all around. But he felt that he needed a sort of Christian Science sustaining, as it were, in this sensuous drifting—something to make his slipping appear more obnoxious.

As he rode up to the veranda of the Residency he saw Elizabeth cutting flowers, probably to decorate the breakfast table. That was like Elizabeth; instead of leaving it to the *mahli*—gardener—with the butler

to festoon the table, she was doing it herself. It was an occupation skilful to water-color painting or lace work, just the sort of thing to find Elizabeth at—typical.

Barlow was possessed of a hopeful fancy that perhaps she had not ridden, expecting that he would call on the Resident; but as always with the Resident's daughter, he could deduct nothing from her manner. She nodded pleasantly on looking up, a gloved hand full of roses, and, as he slipped from the saddle, relinquishing the horse to the *syce*, she fell in beside him as far as the veranda, where they stood talking desultory stuff. The morning sun on the pink and white oleanders, the curious snakelike mottling of the croton leaves, and the song of a *dhyal* that, high in a tamarind, was bubbling liquid notes of joy.

"The Indian robin red breast makes one homesick," Elizabeth said.

"Home—" but the girl put a quick hand on his arm, checking him. The action was absolutely like Elizabeth, imperious. A small, long-tailed, brown-breasted bird had darted across the compound to a mango tree from where he warbled a love song as sweet and rich toned as the evensong of a nightingale.

"The *shama*," Elizabeth said, "when I hear him I close my eyes and picture the downs and oaked hills of England, and fancy I'm listening to the nightingale or the lark."

Barlow turned involuntarily to look into the girl's face. It was an inquisitive look, a wondering look. Gentle sentiment coming from Elizabeth was rather a reversal of form.

Also there was immediately a reversal of bird form, a shatterment of sentiment, a rasping, maddening note from somewhere in the dome of a pipal tree. A koel bird, as if in derision of the feathered songsters, sent forth his shrill, plaintive, "Ko-e-e-el, Ko-e-el, Ko-e-e-el!"

"Ah-a-a!" Barlow exclaimed in disgust. "That's India; the feverbird, the koel, har-binger of the hot spell, of burning sun and stifling dust, and throbbing head."

He cursed the koel, for the gentle mood had slipped from Elizabeth. He had hoped that she would have spoken of yesterday.

give him a snamed solace for the hurt she had given him. Of course Hodson would have told her all about the Gulab. But while that, the service, was sufficient for the Resident, Elizabeth would consider the fact that Barlow knew Bootea well enough to have this service rendered; it would touch her caste—also her exacting nature.

Something like this was floating through his mind as he groped mentally for an explanation of Elizabeth's attitude, the effect of which was neutral; nothing to draw him toward her in a way of moral sustaining; but also, nothing to antagonize him.

She must know that he was leaving on a dangerous mission; but she did not bring it up. Perhaps with her usual diffident reserve she felt that it was his province to speak of that.

At any rate, she called to a hovering bearer telling him to give his master Captain Barlow's salaams. Then, with the flowers, she passed into the bungalow.

Barlow gazed after Elizabeth ruefully, wishing she had thrown him a life belt. However, it did not matter; it was up to him to act in a sane manner. Men of the service were taught to rely on themselves. And in Barlow was the something of breeding that held him to the true thing, to the pole. The breeding might be compared to the elusive thing in the magnetic needle. It did not matter, he would probably marry Elizabeth—it seemed the proper thing to do. Devilish few of the chaps he knew babbled much about love and being batty over a girl—that is, the girls they married.

Then the bearer brought Hodson's salaams to the captain.

And Hodson was a civil servant in *ex-celsis*. He took to bed with him his Form D and Form C—even the "D. O.," the demi official business, and worried over it when he should have slept or read himself to sleep. Duty to him was a more exacting god than the black Kali to the Brahmins; it had dried up his blood, atrophied his nerves of enjoyment. And now he was depressed, though he strove to greet Barlow cheerily.

"It's a devilish shindy, this killing of our two chaps," he burst out. "I've pondered over it, and I've worried over it. The

only solace in the thing is, that the arm of the law is long."

"I think you've got it, sir," Barlow encouraged. "When we've smashed Sindhia—and we will—we'll demand these murderers, hang a few of them, and send the rest to the Andamans."

"Yes, it has simply got to wait; to stir up things now would only let the Peshwa know what you are going to do—we'd show him our hand. And I don't mind telling you, captain, that he is an absolute traitor. And I believe that it's that damn Nana Sahib who's influencing him."

"There's no doubt about it, sir."

"No, there is not!" the Resident declared gloomily. "The two dead *sowars* must be considered as sacrifice, just as though they had fallen in battle; it's for the good of the raj. If I get hauled over the coals for this I don't give a damn. I've pondered over it, almost prayed over it, and it's the only way. There's talk of a big loot of jewelry by these decoits, and the killing of the merchant and his men, but I've got nothing to do with that. The one wonderful thing is, that we saved the papers. That little native woman that brought them to you must be rewarded later. By the way, Barlow, I took the liberty of explaining all that to Elizabeth, and I think she's pretty badly cut up over the way she acted. But you understand, don't you, captain? I believe that if it had been my case I'd have—well, I'd have known that it was because the girl cared. Elizabeth is undemonstrative—too much so, in fact; it's so long ago that I took notice of these things that I find I'm trying to speak in an unknown tongue."

The little man rose and bustled about, pulling out drawers from the cabinet and shoving them back again, venting little asthmatic coughs of sheer nervousness. Then, coming up to Barlow, he held out his hand saying: "My dear boy, God be with you; but don't take chances—will you?"

At that instant Elizabeth appeared at the doorway. "Captain Barlow will have breakfast with us, won't he, father? It's all ready, and Boodha says he has a chop and kidney curry that is a dream."

"Jupiter!" Hodson exclaimed. "Fancy

I'm getting India head, was sending Barlow off without a word about breakfast. Of course he'll stay. Thanks, Elizabeth."

The tired drawn parchment face of the Resident became revived, it was the face of a happy boy; the gray eyes blued to youth. Inwardly he murmured, "Elizabeth is wonderful! I knew it; good girl!"

It was a curious breakfast—mentally. Elizabeth was the Elizabeth of the veranda. Perhaps it was the passionate beating of the pillow the day before, when she had realized for the first time what Barlow meant to her, that now cast her into defense, encased her in an armor of protection, caused her to assume a casualness. She would give worlds to not have said what she had said the day before, but the captain must know that she had been roused by a knowledge of his intimacy with the Gulab. Just what had occurred did not matter—not in the least; it was his place to explain it. That was Elizabeth's way—it was her manner of thought—a subservience of impulse to propriety, to class. In the light of her feeling when she had lain, wet eyed, beating the pillow, she knew that if he had put his arms about her and said just even stupid words—"I'm sorry, Beth; you know I love you"—she would have capitulated, perhaps even in the capitulation have said a Bethism: "It doesn't matter—we'll never mention it again."

But Barlow, very much of a boy, could not feel this elusive thing, and rode away after breakfast from the bungalow muttering: "By gad! Elizabeth should have said something over roasting me. Fancy she doesn't care a hang. Anyway—I'll give her credit for that—she doesn't hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. If it's the prospect of sharing a title with me, a rotter would have eaten the leek. Yes, Elizabeth is class."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THOU ART A DOG!"

DEWAN SEWLAL was in a shiver of apprehension over the killing of the two sepoys; there would be trouble over this if the Resident came to know of it.

But Hunsda had assured him that the soldiers and their saddles had been buried in the pit with the others, and that nobody but the decoits knew of their advent.

Then, when he learned that Ajeet Singh had been to the Resident, he was in a panic. But as that British official made no move, said nothing about the decoity, he fancied that perhaps Ajeet had not mentioned this: in fact, he had no proof that he had made a confession at all. But Ajeet's complicity in the decoity where the merchant and his men had been killed, gave the Dewan just what he had planned for—the power of death over the chief. As to his own complicity he had taken care to speak of the decoity to no one but Hunsda. The *yogi* had been inspired, of course, but the *yogi* would not appear as a witness against him, and Hunsda would not, because it would cost him his head.

So now, at a hint from Nana Sahib, the Dewan seized upon Ajeet, voicing a righteous indignation at his crime of decoity, and gave him the alternative of being strangled with a bowstring or forcing the Gulab to go to the camp of Amir Khan to betray him. Not only would Ajeet be killed, but Bootea would be thrust into the *seraglio*, and the other Bagrees put in prison—some might be killed. Ajeet was forced to yield to these threats. The very complicity of the Dewan made him the more hurried in this thing. Also he wanted to get the Bagrees away to the Pindari camp before the Resident made a move.

The mission to Amir Khan would be placed in the hands of Hunsda and Sookdee, Ajeet being retained as a pawn. Also, his wound had incapacitated him. He was nominally at liberty, though he knew well that if he sought to escape the Mahrattas would kill him.

The jewels that had been stolen from the merchant were largely retained by the Bagrees, though the Dewan found, one night, very mysteriously, a magnificent string of pearls on his pillow. He did not ask questions, and seemingly no one of his household knew anything about the pearls.

When the *yogi* asked Hunsda about the ruby—the Akbar Lamp—Hunsda, who had determined to keep it himself, as, perhaps,

a ransom for his life in that troublous time, declared that in the turmoil of the coming of the soldiers he had not found it. Indeed, this seemed reasonable, for he, having fled down the road to the Gulab, had not been there when they had opened the box and looted it.

So the Dewan sent for Ajeet, Hunsu and Sookdee, and declared that if the Bagree contingent of murder did not start at once for the Pindari camp he would have them taken up for the decoity.

It was Ajeet who answered the Dewan:

"Dewan Sahib, we be men who undertake all things in the favor of Bhowanee, and we make prayer to that goddess. If the Dewan will give fifty rupees for our *pooja*, to-morrow we will make sacrifice to her, for without the feast and the sacrifice the signs that she would vouchsafe would be false. Then we will take the signs and the men will go at once."

"You shall have the money," the Dewan declared, "but do not delay."

That evening the Bagrees made their way to a mango grove for the feast carrying coconuts, raw sugar, flour, butter and a fragrant gum, *goojul*. A large hole was dug in the ground and filled with dry cow-dung chips which were set on fire. Sweet cakes were baked on the fire, and then broken into small pieces, a portion of the fire raked to one side, and their priest sprinkled upon it the fragrant gum, calling in a loud voice: "Maha Kali, assist and guide us in our expedition. Keep calamity from us who worship thee, and have made this feast in thy honor. Give us the sign, that we may know if it is agreeable to thee that we destroy the enemy of Maharaja Sindhia."

When the Bagrees had eaten much cooked rice and meatballs, which were served on plantain leaves, they drank robustly of *mhowa* spirit, first spilling some of this liquor upon the ground in the name of the goddess.

The strong, rank, native liquor roused an enthusiasm for their approaching interview with the sacred one. Once Ajeet laid his hand upon the pitcher that Hunsu was holding to his coarse lips, and pressing it downward, admonished:

"Hunsu, whilst Bhowanee does not pro-

hibit, it is an offense to approach her except in devout silence."

The surly one flared up at this. His ungovernable rage drew his hand to a knife in his belt, and his eyes blazed with the ferocity of a wounded tiger.

"Ajeet," he snarled, "you are now chief, but you are not rajah to command slaves."

With a swift twist of his wrist, Ajeet snatched the pitcher from the hand of Hunsu, saying, "Jamadar, it is the liquor that is in you, therefore you have had enough."

But Hunsu sprang to his feet, and his knife gleamed like the spitting of fire in the slanting rays of the setting sun as he drove viciously at the heart of his chief. There was a crash as the blade struck and pierced the *matka* which Ajeet still held by its long neck.

There was a scream of terror from the throats of the women, a cry of horror from the *guru* at this sacrilege—the spilling of liquor upon the earth in anger at the feast of Bhowanee.

Ajeet's strong fingers, slim, bronzed lengths of steel, had gripped the wrist of his assailant as Bootea, darting forward, laid a hand upon the arm of Hunsu, crying, "Shame, shame! You are like sweepers of low caste—eaters of carrion, they who respect not Bhowanee. Shame! You are a dog—a lapper of liquor!"

At the touch of the Gulab on his arm, and the scorn in her eyes, Hunsu shivered and drew back, his head hanging in abasement, but his face devilish in its malignity.

Ajeet, taking a brass dish, poured water upon the hand that had gripped the wrist of Hunsu, saying, "Thus I will cleanse the defilement." Then he sat down upon his heels, adding, "*Guru*, holy one, repeat a prayer to appease Bhowanee, then we will go into the jungle and take the auspices."

The *guru* strode over to Hunsu, and holding out his thin, skinny palm, commanded, "Jamadar, from you a rupee: and to-morrow I will put upon the shrine of Kali coconuts and sweetmeats and marigolds as peace offerings."

Hunsu took from his loin cloth a silver coin and dropped it surlily in the outstretched hand, sneering: "To Bhowanee

you will give four annas, and you will feast to the value of twelve annas, for that is the way of your craft. The vultures always finish the bait when the tiger has been slain."

Soon the feathery lace work of bamboos beneath which they sat were whispering to the night wind that had roused at the dropping of the huge ball of fire in the west, and the soft radiance of a gentle moon was gilding with silver the gaunt, black arms of a babool. Then the priest said: "Come, jamadars, we now will go deeper into the silent places and listen for the voice of Bhowanee."

He untangled from the posture of sitting his parchment-covered matter of bones, and carrying in one hand a brocaded bag of black velvet and in the other a staff, with bowed head and mutterings, started deeper into the jungle of cactus and slim, whispering bamboo, followed by Ajeet, Sookdee and Hunsu. Presently he stopped, saying, "Sit you in a line, brave chiefs, facing the great temple of Siva, which is in the mountains of the east, so that the voice of Bhowanee, coming out of the silent places and from the mouth of the jackal or the jackass, shall be known to be from the right or the left, for thus will be the interpretation."

The priest took his place in front of the jamadars, sitting with his back to them, and placed upon the ground, first a white cloth of cotton, and then the velvet bag, upon which rested a silver pick-ax.

When Ajeet saw the pick-ax he said angrily, "That is the emblem of thugs; we be decoits, not stranglers, *guru*."

"They are equal in honor with Bhowanee," the *guru* replied; "they slay for profit, even as you do, and among you are those who are thugs, for I minister to both."

Then the *guru* buried his shriveled skull in his thin hands and drooped forward in silent listening. Ajeet objected no more, and in the new silence they could hear the shrill rasping of cicada in the foliage of a gigantic elephant-creeper, that, like a huge python, crawled its way from branch to branch, sprawling across a dozen stately trees. From somewhere beyond was a steady *tonk! tonk! tonk!*—like the beat

of wood against a hollow pipe—of the little green-plumaged coppersmith bird. A honey-badger came timorously creeping, his feet shuffling the fallen leaves, peered at the strange figures of the men, and, at the move of an arm, fled scurrying through the stillness with the noise of some great creature.

Suddenly the jungle was stilled, even from the voice of the rasping cicada; the leaves had ceased to whisper, for the wind had hushed. The devotees could hear the beating of their hearts in the strain of waiting for a manifestation from the dread goddess. The white-robed figure of the *guru* was like a shriveled statue of alabaster where the faint moon picked it out in blotches as the light filtered through leaves above.

Sookdee gasped in terror as just above them a tiny tree owl called, "Whoo-who, whoo-who!" as if he jeered. But Ajeet knew that that, in their belief, was a sign of encouragement, meaning not overmuch, but not an evil omen. From far off floated up on the dead night air the bellling note of a startled cheetal, and almost at once the harsh, grating, angry roar of a leopard, as though he had struck for the throat of the stag and missed. These were but jungle voices, not in the curriculum of their pantheistic belief, so the *guru* and the Bagrees sat in silence, and no one spoke.

Then the night carried the faint, trembling moan of a jackal coming from a distance on the left.

"Oo-oo-oo-oo! Aye-aye! Yi-yi-yi-yi!" the jackal wailed, the note rising to a fiendish crescendo; and then suddenly it hushed, and there was only a ghastly silence in the jungle depths.

The white-clothed, ghostlike priest sprang to his feet, and with his lean arm stretched high in supplication, said: "Bhowanee, thou hast vouchsafed to thy devotees the *pilao*. We will strew thy shrine with flowers and sweetmeats."

He turned to the jamadars who had risen, saying: "Bhowanee is pleased: the auspices are favorable. Had the call been from the right it would have been the *tibao*, and we should have had to wait until the sweet goddess gave us another sign. Now we may go back, and perhaps she will confirm this omen as we go."

Hunsa, always possessed of a mean disposition, and still sulky over the encounter with Ajeet, was in an evil mood as they trudged through the jungle to their camp. When Ajeet spoke of the priest's success in his appeal, he snarled: "The hangman always advises the one who is to have his neck stretched that he is better off dead."

"What do you mean by that?" Ajeet queried.

"Just that you are not going on this mission, Ajeet." Then he laughed disagreeably.

"If you are afraid to go Sookdee will be well without you," Ajeet retorted.

Before more could be said in this way, and as they approached the camp, the lowing of a cow was heard.

"Dost hear that, *guru?*" Hunsa queried. "In a decoity is not the lowing of a cow in a village held to be an evil omen?"

"Not so, Hunsa," the priest declared.

"It is an evil omen if the decoity is to be made on the village in which the cow raises her voice, but we are going to our own camp in peace, and it is a voice of approval."

"As to that," Ajeet commented, "if Hunsa is right, it is written in our code of omens that hearing a cow call thus simply means that one of the party making the decoity will be killed; perhaps as he was the one to notice it, the evil will fall upon him."

"You'd like that," Hunsa growled.

"Not being given to lies, it would not displease me, for, as the hangman said, you would be better dead."

But they were now at their camp, and the jamadars, standing together for a little, settled it that the omens being favorable, and the wrath of the Dewan feared, they would proceed to the Pindari camp next day.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

U U U U

THE PLOW

ABOVE yon somber swell of land
 Thou seest the dawn's grave orange hue,
 With one pale streak like yellow sand,
 And over that a vein of blue.

Over the broad hill creeps a beam,
 Like hope that gilds a good man's brow,
 And now ascends the nostril-stream
 Of stalwart horses come to plow.

Ye rigid plowmen, bear in mind
 Your labor is for future hours!
 Advance—spare not—nor look behind;
 Plow deep and straight with all your powers.

Richard Hengist Horne.



Six Good Men

By GEORGES SURDEZ

An' the women come out to cut up
your remains,
Just roll to your rifle an' blow out your
brains,
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

Kipling.

A THIN layer of mud over the compact clay soil had rendered footing treacherous, and for the fifth time that morning Corporal Personne picked himself up, shifted his straps and resumed his place in the long file of men. Then he contemplated the Indo-Chinese landscape with disfavor.

It was February, 1884, and since December of the previous year, the tiny garrison at Tuyen Quan, a little over five hundred men, under the command of Major Domine, with but six pieces of artillery and only six engineers, had held out heroically against a Black Flag army of several thousand led by Luu Vinh Phuoc. Personne's battalion

was the advance guard of the column moving to the relief.

Thin veils of fog drizzled a warm rain that diluted the pipe clay on the corporal's pith helmet, ran down his face, seeped inside his collar and hung in drops from his bristly beard. On either side of the narrow roadway—seldom wide enough for two men to march abreast—the rice fields, flooded with a foot of water, sent up a suffocating moisture. Out of nowhere, apparently, bullets sang and snapped like over-taut violin strings. A man, just hit, pitched forward, face into the water, his hardware clattering about him. From the rear came the cursing of the naval gunners, in charge of the two eighty millimeter guns, coaxing the recalcitrant mules forward.

The men were not in the best of humor. Since early morning they had contended with narrow roads, dampness and heat and the pot shooting of the Chinese pirates hid-

den in the clumps of high grass scattered over the dreary plain. The Legionaires were ripe for a fight. Let the Black Flags make a stand, and they would pay. That the French republic considered her rights to the Province of Tonkin greater than the claim of the King of Annam did not concern these hardened soldiers of the Legion. The right and wrong of the international quarrel seemed beside the mark with an enemy who took pleasure in torturing his captives.

But Corporal Personne remained comparatively cheerful. This was his life work, and he loved it. Small inconveniences would soon be forgotten in the thrill of conflict. He was an American, born and bred. Some incident, unknown to his comrades, perhaps forgotten by himself, had driven him first to France, then into the Foreign Legion, where no questions are asked.

A strange lot they were! There in front of him was an ex-priest; at his back the son of a grand duke; and by his side his best friend, Pat, an ex-street sweeper from Dublin. And he himself had enlisted under the name of "Personne," which is French for "Nobody." These Legionaires, from the corners of the earth, became part of a solid unit, welded together as they were by the "*esprit de corps*"—the soul of an army. From the confines of the Sahara, from the town of Sidi bel Abbes, the "home" of the Legion, France had called her adopted sons to Indo-China.

As the column reached the lower slopes of a range of hills the day suddenly brightened. The sun, breaking through the mists, picked out the metallic ornaments on the uniforms with vivid sparkles of color. The song-bird, the son of an Arab peanut dealer in Dakar, started a popular ballad, and the men picked up the chorus, not always harmonious, but encouraging to the jaded officers, who feared for the morale.

When the troops reached the crest of the hill and a halt was called, Major Epervier, in command, gathered his officers about him. Away from barracks, they were all men together, and rank, except in actual line of duty, was not impressed. Months of campaigning forcibly creates friendship—or hatred. At any rate, etiquette is relaxed. Through field glasses the major had dis-

covered the red roof of a pagoda emerging from the tangle of bush in the valley below.

"No signs of life," put in the youngest captain, naturally the first to talk.

"One can't always tell," the major answered.

"Why not go down and find out?" the naval lieutenant impetuously suggested. He had been put in charge of the artillery possibly because the guns were drawn by mules. In the general army scheme, the square plug should always be placed in a round hole. A lawyer should rub down horses, a blacksmith keep books in regimental offices.

"A valley is not the best strategical position for an isolated body of infantry liable to attack by superior numbers," the major remarked dryly. "You know what the Flags are at close quarters, where we have no chance to use superior discipline and tactics."

"But the column must pass there either to-day or to-morrow. Why not let me have a few men and find out?" the ardent young lieutenant went on.

The major smiled at the thought of the inexperienced officer blundering down into the village. "I have formal instructions not to risk my officers. I think, though, I have the man for the job. He's been in my battalion five years, and whatever he's been given to do, he did—and came back—"

"The pitcher to the well—"

"Perhaps—" agreed the major and turned abruptly. "Personne!"

Corporal Personne, drying his clothes by the fire, pulled his seventy-five inches erect and came over to the major where he stood at attention in a not overclean undershirt. In the palm of his hand he held his pipe while he hurriedly swallowed the last of a bit of ammunition bread. The officers smiled, but he remained impassive. His eyes even did not flicker. Though often treated with consideration, he never relaxed his reserve. This had given rise to the belief that he was a plutocrat by birth. His heels together, little finger on the seam of his trousers, Corporal Personne, the perfect non-com, now awaited orders.

The major cleared his throat with an awkward cough. "These are not orders, Personne. You may refuse if you wish."

He indicated the pagoda. "The village down there may be occupied. It may not. I want to find out."

"Yes, sir."

"Risky, but you and I have seen worse, eh?"

"Much worse, major," Personne assented gravely. "How many men shall I take?"

"Five."

Personne went back to the fire. A few minutes low conversation and the five men got up, resumed their clothing, picked up their rifles from the stacks, tightened the chin straps of their helmets. Personne led the way down the hill, where they were soon lost to view.

"There go six good men," the major declared. He knew some of his men personally, was familiar with their history, played father confessor, knew their real names that he might advise their relatives in case of death.

"They're gone, all right—if that village is occupied," the naval lieutenant put in, "unless we move down if we hear firing."

"I half suspect you of deliberately trying to get us into a mess," the major observed. "You'd ask nothing better than to play with your new pets. Whatever happens, we can't move until the whole column comes up and I get orders from the colonel—"

"Who'll probably take three days to make up his mind," disrespectfully added the sailor. "Whatever happens, let's hope the fellows aren't taken alive."

II.

PERSONNE had wisely picked his men: Mitri, the Russian; Pat; Biccio; Sanglier, the boar, so called because of his massive shoulders and hairy face; and Ganache, who jokingly pretended to be an English lord, though his accent was cockney and his name French. They advanced slowly through the high grass, the tops of which rustled several feet above their heads. At least half an hour's time elapsed before they came in sight of the village, a cluster of mud huts forming a street, with the pagoda standing fully two hundred yards away.

"My mother, the milordess, would be surprised to see me," Ganache whispered, for

the silence weighed upon him. "She would never allow me out without the maid and the fifth footman—"

Personne signaled for silence, ordered his men to wait, and himself stepped out into the open. When no one appeared, he called the others to join him. They searched the huts. Ashes still warm in the fireplaces, the usual stench of the native village, a dog, a few pigs running about—nothing more. Ganache stopped in front of a placard, ran his fingers along the line of Chinese characters, pretending to spell out the words: "Mr. and Mrs. Mandarin, compelled to depart for health reasons, left the key under the mat—"

Sanglier slapped him on the back. The others joined in the laugh, more from nervousness than genuine mirth. As Biccio bent past Ganache's shoulders, to add his comment, a shot rang out, and he sank, a bullet in his throat.

Sanglier, his face scarlet from excitement, swore volubly in five languages. Mitri turned and fired into the bush, nonchalantly as though he were paying a visit to a private game preserve. Pat and Personne were methodical. Ganache kept his eyes on his corporal, as though awaiting orders.

"Make for the pagoda," cried Personne, and set the example. The others followed. No sooner were they in the open than the Flags swarmed out of the grass and pressed down upon them.

"Back to back!" Personne's voice rose above the uproar. The Gras rifles rattled and the conflict became hand to hand.

Pat went down first, his head hacked off by a yataghan stroke. Mitri, beaten to his knees, managed a grin before he was finished. Sanglier, bleeding from several wounds, wept in his rage. Tears and perspiration streaked the dirt on his face. A pistol shot smashed through both cheeks; the blood ran from his mouth. He fell sprawled on the ground, and groaned as steel dug into his back. Only Personne and Ganache were left, back to back, the tall American towering above the diminutive cockney.

"Say, big one!" the little man shouted. "Don't worry about me. Run for the pagoda—you can make it—"

"Shut up—you d— fool—"

"Well—if you won't listen to reason—"

Ganache turned the muzzle of his piece upward, and pressed the trigger. He would not be taken alive.

Personne was alone now, his helmet fallen off, a deep cut in his scalp. He swung his rifle by the barrel, freed a circle around him. With desperate fury, he leaped into the midst of the assailants. He was an American, therefore handy with his fists. And the Legion cultivates "*la savatte*," the art of fighting with one's feet. He was soon in the open with a clear way. And where could he go except toward the pagoda?

The door was closed, fastened on the inside, and he found himself cornered. Oh, for the sight of the old battalion, charging through the filthy street, with their chin straps between their teeth! His back against the door, he pulled a revolver from an inside pocket. With the first shot he picked off the leader, who dropped his long barbed spear to clutch at his stomach, and rolled over on the ground. The others hesitated for a moment only, then, with a shout of angered determination, closed in.

With each shot Personne dropped a man. After the fifth he lifted the barrel to his temple. Before he could pull the trigger, in that fraction of a second that he hesitated, the door behind him opened and he was conscious of falling backward. The sudden drop, the deep darkness, dazed him. But he knew that the door had closed and that he was inside.

The corporal picked himself up, laughing. He recalled many other hair-breadth escapes. No; this wasn't his last adventure. Something was looking after him—the thing men call "luck." But—although luck seemed to have caused the door to swing open, whence came the positive force to swing it shut again? Luck must have had an assistant.

He fumbled for a match. The sulphur sputtered, then flamed—and lit up—first, a patch of silk fabric, multicolored; then a slim, tiny hand with shining finger nails; above that, a graceful brownish throat and the face of a girl. The complexion was rose on olive, delicately tinted as porcelain.

The match burned his fingers, and he

dropped it to the floor, reached out and touched the girl's shoulder. The silk rustled, and her flesh seemed cool, like polished marble.

"Thank you, miss. You sure picked the right moment—" he whispered into the darkness.

She answered in native dialect. Personne was at a loss until the few words he had picked up around the barracks in Hanoi came back to him. She had been praying in the pagoda for a husband, a white husband. The corporal laughed loudly. Women are the same the world over, something new, a uniform never fails.

He patted her cheek. Outside the Chinese were pounding on the door.

"You poor little devil! If you've elected me you'll soon be a widow—unless I get out of here."

His doll-like companion chattered volubly. This time he could not understand. All was now quiet outside, an ominous silence. Perhaps they had sent for the "bonze," or whatever they called their priest, to come and open the door.

"How does one get out?" he urged.

She must have understood, for her soft, warm little hand nestled in his big palm, closing around his fingers. She moved away, gently tugging at him. After a few steps he heard her fumble with a latch of some sort. To help, he lit another match. She sneezed as the pungent smell of sulphur teased her nostrils and her brown eyes gleamed with amusement. He smiled. Why shouldn't he? Would he not be soon on his way back to the battalion?

Then a door opened. He faced about, dazzled by the sudden light, and reached for his revolver. His mind framed the thoughts with lightning rapidity. He had one cartridge left, and a fighting chance to reach the open. Should he use it on himself, or take the risk? Once before he had been about to shoot himself and something had saved him. "To the last ditch," he muttered, and fired into the thick of the Flags, flung the weapon in the face of the nearest, and plunged in with flying fists.

For a brief moment he hoped—then some one tripped him. Before he could recover, he was seized around the legs, by the arms,

and a rope was thrown about his neck, twisted to cut off his breath. It was only a matter of minutes before he found himself bound and carried into the open. The girl had screamed, as though in terror. But in her eyes he read a deep pity—and something more. Admiration—love? He would never know.

The Flags dropped him, without undue gentleness, near a mud hut in the center of the village. A couple of blows from a rifle butt impressed upon him the uselessness of struggle. He remained quiet until the crowd moved away, then managed to gain a sitting position against the mud wall. But he had not been left unguarded. A dirty Flag, his felt shod feet folded beneath him, looking like a particularly ugly Buddha, noisily chewed a kaki, the blood-red fruit of the Orient. He caught Personne's eye, grinned, and pointed to the opposite side of the square.

The five heads of his companions had been planted on stakes. Distorted, caricatured, Mitri's face alone had conserved its look of insolent superiority, and the bloodless lips curved slightly as though in contemptuous amusement. Sanglier, one eye staring, the other half closed, appeared to wink leeringly at his corporal. Personne shuddered and turned away.

Weakened and nauseated by the loss of blood, his bruised body half numb, the hours dragged by endlessly. The sun began to decline. The heat grew less. Yet thirst made his tongue thick and raspy. The guard must have noticed that he frequently licked his lips, for he called out lustily, and a youth brought a pail of water. This was spilled slowly upon the ground. This was repeated many times before the coolness of the night made itself felt, and the Black Flags emerged from the bush, one by one.

Women and children materialized out of nowhere. The gurgling, shouting, squealing multitude milled around the square, in and out of the huts—cooked, quarreled, played games, paused in front of him and jeered. In vain he looked for his little friend of the pagoda. And yet why did he look? Surely she did not belong in this ill-smelling swarm.

He began to wonder what would be his

lot, what refinements of suffering. They might drag him around the interior in a bamboo cage, feeding him on offals, loathsome beyond description, or be content tonight with a few minor operations, such as tearing out his finger nails or slicing off his nose. To-morrow they could spread-eagle him under the noonday sun, with his eyelids cut off and his fingers stretched open by little pegs; or they might skin him alive, or give him the water cure, or a simpler method: repeated blows on the soles of his feet until he went mad or died.

Personne sought to compose himself, to hide every trace of fear or agony, when another bucket of water splashed down in front of him and sank into the dusty soil. A fat, silk-clad mandarin spoke a few words, gravely as a quiet gentleman orders his dinner. The corporal was lifted, carried to the hut nearest the recently kindled fire and securely fastened by wrists and ankles, limbs outstretched, on a framework formed like the letter X. The Flags had a wholesome respect for the hard fists of the Legionaire, and were careful to free him by degrees, a hand, a foot, one at a time, attached securely before passing on to the next. When operations were at last completed, the frame was elevated and braced against a wall, Personne's full weight being borne by wrists and ankles.

The crowd then gathered, jostled and pushing. The smaller boys worked their way to the front rank as he remembered having done himself to watch circus parades. From the swarm of yellow faces came a cheerful, expectant buzz. The thongs cut into Personne's flesh until merciful numbness gave momentary ease. Then his tormentors pushed his head as far back as possible without snapping the vertebrae, and fastened it in that position with a leather strap around his neck. A round piece of wood was then inserted between the frame and the small of his back. The strain on the muscles was terrific. Perspiration beaded his forehead, and the blood from his gashed wrists trickled down his arms to the elbows.

A drop of moisture on his head. His heart leaped—rain. He remembered having cursed the rain that morning—and now—

ah—another drop! He protruded his tongue with the thought that—perhaps— But when he understood, he smothered a groan. For hours he would feel that steady dripping, always the same quantity at exact intervals, at precisely the same spot on his skull, until the pain and the unceasing wait for the next drop would drive him mad.

With sudden desperation he strained at the ropes, which drove the straps but deeper. He could move his head a trifle, a fraction of an inch. He would be careful to do this quietly or they would see him and take away his last comfort. Then realization came to him that this was also planned to prolong the agony.

The leader came close and regarded him critically. Personne spat in the fat, yellow face, thinking to bring things to a close. But the Flag wiped his cheek and joined the others. The drops fell—and fell. At least an hour passed. The pain was excruciating, and he ceased to be able to move the half-paralyzed neck muscles. His swollen eyeballs seemed ready to burst—the yellow faces—the firelight danced and swung before him. And he was thirsty. He thought of water—waterfalls, foaming and crashing down deep chasms; lakes with clear, fresh water, transparent and showing golden sand and round pebbles at the bottom; the sea, roaring in his ears.

Now his head was a huge anvil, and gigantic hammers were pounding on it, five-ton hammers that beat regularly and would never stop. Thump—thump—his neck would stand a little more, he shifted a fraction. The drop fell on that spot, and soon it, too, was being pounded away by the great pile drivers. He laughed loudly.

III.

THE Chinaman is only stolid on occasion. He knows how to enjoy himself. The on-lookers rocked with mirth. The mandarin chuckled softly. Yes, he could make white men crazy, more foolish than the fat babies who played with the swine in the dung. The victims usually held out longer, but this sea devil had been weakened by his wound and the hot sun.

When they unfastened Personne he fell

to the ground and lay motionless. He was harmless, crazy. They would keep him from sharp weapons and watch him. They laughed again when he sat up and stared around vacantly. Unsteadily he got to his feet and wobbled about in search of water. After having been given a drink he threw the bowl high in the air and laughed. They laughed with him and followed as he staggered toward the five stakes on the opposite side of the square.

He saluted the heads of his dead comrades with a broad wave. Then he harangued in a loud voice, pointing first to the east, then the west. He shook his fists, groaned, spat, sobbed. Then he relived the fight—lunged out with a bayonet, though his hand held no weapon, ducked yataghan strokes, wrestled with a phantom foe, ran to the spot where the white men had formed the hollow square, and reacted every blow, every killing. He went down in imitation of Pat, fell to his knees as Mitri, shrieked as Sanglier had done.

The Black Flags recognized the moves, and their amusement increased. Here was a madman with a memory. As he kicked and punched into space, more than one rubbed his bruises gingerly. Personne turned and approached the headless bodies of his men which had been laid out in line, awaiting a leisurely division of the spoils.

The single Chinese soldier on watch moved back as he approached. Personne tapped each body on the chest and loudly called out a name. Then he straightened up with a dazed, vacant stare. Fumbling in his pocket, he pulled out an imaginary revolver. The guard laughed loudly. This was superior comedy. "Bang! Bang!" the corporal shouted in imitation of the revolver's bark, and moved toward the pagoda, turning and shouting at intervals: "Bang! Bang!"

With a few quick words the chief ordered him brought back to the fire. The guard approached, the same who had watched over the Legionaire earlier in the day. The corporal shrank away and laughter again rose from the spectators. Suddenly, without warning, the sea devil seized the Chinaman around the waist with one arm, lifted him off the ground, placing his free hand under

the chin and forcing the head back. A brief struggle, the native's legs kicking wildly in the air, his hand fumbling for the dirk at his belt. Then the Flag's neck snapped and he grew limp.

For a moment Personne faced the on-rushing crowd, the body in his arms, his face demoniacal in the red fire glow. Then with a mighty effort, he hurled the dead man among his comrades, and with another crazy, inarticulate moan, made for the pagoda.

IV.

THE three officers of the advanced guard, depressed and worried, sat around the fire.

"I feel like a murderer," the major declared at length.

"War is war—" the naval lieutenant tried to console him.

"I hope they didn't take him alive," put in the captain.

There was a long silence. The major's pipe went out, and he forgot to relight it.

"I hope Personne died fighting," he said shortly, when the oppression grew too heavy. "That's the way he would have liked—"

The others nodded. The unpleasant topic was not mentioned again.

A sharp challenge, indistinct shouting, and footsteps approaching rapidly. The sudden commotion brought them to their feet, startled. His torso bare, streaked with the dark stains of dried blood, a disheveled white man staggered into the firelight.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" the major exclaimed. "It's Personne!"

The corporal came to attention, brought his hand to a salute. His features relaxed into impassibility, his words were brief and to the point:

"Corporal Personne reports the village occupied."



A RIME OF OPPORTUNITY

THE trumpet is flinging its keen, urgent cry to you,
The eager wind ruffles the mane;
Comrade, good-by and good-by and good-by to you—
Mounting and riding again!

So you go bravely while I am still trailing
Low in the dust or the rain;
But ride and fight stoutly! My heart is not failing;
Some day I shall follow again.

Ride, then, and charge, then, right into the worst of it,
So your new chance is not vain:
'Tis a stiff fight, as we knew from the first of it,
And you will be in it again!

Remember not me, or remember uncaring,
Unhurt by the failure and pain.
Good luck go with you and follow your faring!
Your foot's in the stirrup again!

S. H. Kemper.



The Bird of Passage

By JOHN SCHOOLCRAFT

Author of "Let the Wedding Wait," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ROMANCE OF FOOD.

AFTER it was all over Springtime's mind reverted to what was to him the most important thing about the whole ball game: just what effect it would have on his relations with Osborne. They were sitting in the stable, and in Springtime's pocket was Durkin's money—fifty and a bit over.

Osborne was pleased—so pleased that as he sat in the old swivel chair he whistled a tune between his teeth and beat the long roll with his finger tips. The corn-cob smoked in one fist and on the old man's face was an expression of gentle good humor which Springtime had never seen there before. All the indications were good, and he began to spar for an opening.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 30.

"It's been one strenuous week."

"Where did you find that lad?" asked Osborne, who all through the week, had not asked a word of explanation from Springtime about where or how he got his recruit.

"Out in the jungles. I've seen him off and on for some long time, but I never did know he was a ball player."

"Springtime," said Osborne, who had picked the name up from hearing Durkin speak it, "you'll have to admit that there aren't many men in the world who would trust such an important thing as finding a pitcher to a man he had not known any longer than I know you. My Lord! When I think of how I first met up with you I wonder why I haven't had you in the calaboose!"

He chuckled, and Springtime reddened at the thought of the agony he had gone

though to get that bit of pie. He said nothing, but watched the water dripping from the trough in a stream made golden by the sun.

"How are you getting along with your work?" asked Osborne after a long pull on the corn-cob.

Springtime answered warily: "Oh, so-so."

"The market will be opening pretty soon," said Osborne, "and I might be able to plant a few bushels of extra fancy hand-picked beans, provided you get 'em done before they turn to dust."

"So you're expecting me," said the wanderer, "to go on and finish that job?"

"Why not?"

"After I went out and got a pitcher for you?"

"I don't see that that has anything to do with it. I didn't ask you to, did I? And we had no agreement to the effect that if you got me a pitcher, you could lay off sorting beans. You volunteered to get me a ball player and I told you to go ahead, but I said nothing and you said nothing about stopping that particular job I put you on. I make it a rule never to refuse when a man comes along and offers to do me a service."

Springtime jumped to his feet.

"Where would you have been if I hadn't got that man for you?"

"Right where I am now," returned Osborne with another long pull on his pipe, "and let me give you some advice—you spend too much energy in getting het up over trifles. The man that gets there is the man who economizes force. There is more than one good pitcher in the world—probably a dozen within fifty miles of here that could pitch rings around that loafer."

"But you hadn't found one, and I'm darned if I think you *could* have found one!"

"I'll take a chance on that. You don't think I didn't have any pitchers in reserve, do you?"

Springtime felt that he was battering his head against a stone wall and sat down again on his straw bale and gripped his hands to hold down the safety valve. The worst of it was that Osborne was right; there had been no agreement between them.

"You don't understand," he said, realizing that if Osborne knew the whole truth from his lips he would be betraying Durkin, "I *saved* that game for you. Durk has to be handled with gloves and—where would you have been if it hadn't been for me?"

"I don't know and I don't care," said Osborne, who was putting the finish on a perfect day. "What you are talking about has nothing to do with picking beans. The thing for you to do is to get it into your head once and for all that I have the dope on you and it 'll be easier for everybody if you kick in and sort beans. I have a darned good notion that it will be good for you."

"I'm not a hard man—what you've done so far wouldn't keep a canary in bird seed, and I've been feeding you for a couple of weeks, but I'll forget all that and we'll start over again. I'll give you your board and one bushel out of every five that you finish. That one bushel is yours, and you can eat it or turn it into cash or throw it away just as you please. And there never was a bean-picker as well paid as that in this vale of tears, and I hang only one provision on it—you'll have to do so much a day."

"I haven't figured it out yet, but I'll have to make some sort of condition like that or you'd be here the rest of your life. I'd like to see what you would do with eight bushels of beans once you got them. And I wouldn't go tearing off over the countryside, either, because you'll only get yourself caught and brought back. Come along, it's time to go up to the house."

"Eight bushels of beans!" gasped Springtime. "Meaning I have to do forty altogether!"

Osborne nodded.

"That's it. You're quick at figures. But I'll change that—I'll make it that you have to do twenty—and then doing the other twenty will be optional. Maybe," he concluded with a grin, "you'll like it so well when you get twenty bushels done that you'll want to do all the beans in town."

Springtime was too hot to speak. He sat gripping his arms and crowding back the flood of hard words that rushed to his lips. Osborne repeated his invitation to come to the house, but Springtime, although he realized that he was caught, did not move.

"Shift, darn you!" shouted his jailer, and inch by inch he got up, and putting on his own coat, followed the old man into the house, where he went straight upstairs and to bed, without his supper. He was undisturbed, although he could hear the hall floor creaking under Mrs. Osborne's tread. It was simply impossible for him to sit at the same table with Tom Osborne without blowing off in some way.

In the morning he was back in the galvanized iron jail with his beans around him, but so sick for freedom that he did not plunge his hand once into the bins. It was a physical impossibility for him to do so—his mind told him that there were only twenty bushels of the cursed vegetable between him and freedom, yet he could not drag himself to work, just as the schoolboy knows that unless he gets his history lesson there will be hard times in school, yet cannot bring himself to study that lesson. It was real torture, and Springtime looked back on those few days on the road with Durkin with a passionate, homesick longing, as being the best days he had ever spent and likely to be the best days he ever would spend.

In mid-morning he had a visitor—Durkin, who had a faculty for smelling out the hiding places of anybody. There was a curious change in Durkin, for in spite of the fact that he had not yet been paid for his labor, he was wearing a new pair of shoes. He walked into the shed and looked about him.

"Is this your studio, old chap?"

"Yes."

"Rumor hath it that you have some coin for me."

Springtime gave him the envelope, and his fellow wanderer put it in his pocket without even opening it—absolute proof that he was a great man if ever one lived. It was a tribute not only to the honesty of Springtime, but to the generosity of his employer, and at the same time a hint that, after all, money was only a rather inconvenient way of exchanging values. He sat down on one of the bins and brushed some dust from his sleeve. That coat had already been brushed so that it was cleaner than the one Tom Osborne wore; there were

other queer signs about Durkin of some sort of regeneration: new necktie and shined shoes.

Durkin looked with some amusement at the measures and bins and beans on the floor and remarked: "Soft job, this."

"Sure it is," said Springtime warmly. "Durk, why don't you come over and get the old boy to give you a job, too? All you have to do is to pick the dark ones out of the light ones, or the light ones out of the dark ones. For every five bushels I do I get one—all my own, to sell, hock, or throw in the river. You stick here and help me get this done, and then we'll beat it together."

Durkin raised his finger and shook his head.

"No, thanks, my boy. There's too much sameness about that job, and I'm not beating it just yet. Springtime, this town's a gold mine!"

"Now, look here, Durk," said Springtime in alarm, "remember, I'm responsible for bringing you here and if anything should happen, I'd be the goat."

"Don't worry—don't worry. This is all inside the law. Just slip down to the Star of Life Mission some night. That's where I'm living from now on."

Springtime stared at Durkin, but could read nothing in his face except a lively satisfaction with himself and his prospects.

"Mission!" said Springtime. "You don't mean you're panhandling the sky-pilots?"

"Better than that," said Durkin; "much, much better." And getting up he walked to the door.

"Is that where you got the new kicks?" asked Springtime, but the other turned around with a significant wave of the hand and was gone.

The toiler had no interruptions until noon—not even spells of work, until Osborne came in. He glanced at the empty measures and said nothing, but opening bin after bin ran his hands deep into the contents and let them trickle through his fingers. He made the rounds of the shed and said: "Did you ever think about the romance of food?"

"What?"

"I said the romance of food, young fellow!" exclaimed Osborne.

"No. Is there such a thing?"

"I'll tell a man there is. Wars have been won on these things"—letting a handful fall back into the bin—"and nations are going to hell for lack of 'em. Body builders. Strong boys and healthy men. I don't suppose you have ever thought of what broom-making means to the world?"

"I can't say that I have."

"It could hardly be expected of you. But think of what the broom means. No brooms in the Middle Ages—black death sweeps 'em off. Think of all the houses that are livable and happy because of brooms—take the broom away and the house becomes a hovel. Take brooms away and the death rate doubles in a week. Now if you were in the broom business, wouldn't that mean something to you—wouldn't it make you want to turn out good ones, better than any one else ever turned out? But, of course, I couldn't expect a roamer like you to see that."

"I'm not a roamer," said Springtime, clenching his teeth, "I'm a bum—a plain American bum. If I am it's my affair. I'm happy to be one, and the day I shake the dust of this town from my feet will be the happiest in my life. I'll celebrate it the way the Frogs do Bastille Day."

"Bastille," said Osborne with a leer, "that's French for jail, isn't it?"

"Yes."

Springtime's tormentor laughed loudly, as though he had seen something extremely funny, and looking Springtime up and down, traced circles in the air, as though he were painting him with stripes.

"Well," he said in the best of humor, "nature has its freaks. Man was born to work and women to weep, although I don't believe the last of that old wheeze. I do believe the first. But there are all sorts of freaks in nature; spinster moose that live by themselves and won't take a mate, and hermit beaver that won't be bothered with family cares. Nature makes a little mistake once in a while, but not often, and when she does she takes care of it quick. No matter how many loafers there are, there will always be enough workers to keep things go-

ing and they'll always manage to make life hell for the ones that don't work."

"Preach on!"

"Yes, I enjoy casting pearls once in a while. I don't give a darn what becomes of you after you get this job done, but I've just naturally got it into my fool head that you've got to do it. When do you think you can get twenty bushels finished?"

"Never! So help me, I'll never touch another bean as long as I live!"

"Rather work in a quarry, huh?" said the old man. "That's where they put 'em in this State. Slim McCabe was a guard up there before he came down here and cleaned this town up, and I've heard he was a spring lamb compared to the rest of 'em. I'm onto you, young fellah, me lad, and if ever I cut loose, there'll be hell popping for you."

"Oh, get to hell out of here!" raged Springtime.

"No, I'm going to the house for lunch," returned his tormentor. "I guess you don't feel like coming. No? All right."

He walked out and left the door wide open—and all the way to the house he was chuckling. Mrs. Osborne was at one of her interminable luncheons; Kitty was silent all through the meal, but as he went toward the door after it, she backed him into a corner, took him by the coat lapels, and said: "I've got to know just what's going on. What have you done with him? Why isn't he here?"

"I've done nothing with him."

"Come through, baby eyes! Where is he?"

"Down in the bean shed—mad as a hornet. He'd have lammed me if I had stayed a minute longer."

"Look here, old-timer, you don't think he had anything to do with that hold-up, do you?"

"Well, I'm not saying," said Osborne, and tried to look forbidding.

Kitty shook him—rather she went through the motions, for he stood as solid as rock and she moved.

"You know you don't think so," she said, "and I've got to know what you are up to. What devilry is going on within that handsome head now?"

"I'm just having a little fun," said Osborne. "He hates picking beans worse than a boy hates to be spanked. I'm just trying to see what a hobo is good for."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LIBERATOR.

AFTER her father had gone Kitty walked swiftly down to the tin shed. The prisoner was sitting in his chair with his back to the bin, and Kitty's quick eye read in his face real suffering. He was white, and his cheeks were drawn as if he were under torture. She was certain that he was thinner than on the day he had first become acquainted with beans; beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and while his chair was tipped back in a lounging position, she could see that every muscle in him was strung up ready for an explosion of some sort. Kitty clasped her hands tight to keep down that feeling which came over her—a feeling which, if it was not pity, was closely akin to it. She walked quickly across to him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"It's a shame," said she, "to put a man like you at work like this. You simply can't do it, can you?"

"They have me stopped!"

"I'd feel the same about putting a mustang on a milk wagon," said Kitty, "as I would about putting you at this work. I wish you were out of here—for your sake."

"Oh, don't I!" returned Springtime in a passion of longing. "Don't I! I'd travel in a reefer a thousand miles and think it was great. Girl, you don't know what it means to be shut up."

His eyes were on the open door and his face was hungry.

"Why don't you go?"

"Jail! I've always kept out of jail. If I hate this, think what I would feel in jail. I'd die!"

"You would," said Kitty. "And I'm thinking that if you stay here you'll die, or come close to it. It's different with you—when the time comes for you to move, you ~~be~~ to that's all. You go. I simply can't stand by and see a man's heart broken."

"If I have to stand this any longer—I'll do murder!"

"Skip along, then, and I'll fix it so that you won't have to worry about anything. I know you didn't have anything to do with that hold-up. Nobody believes you did—least of all me, and I honestly think dad doesn't believe it. He's trying you out. He'll do anything I set my heart on, and when he comes home to-night I'll tell him I let you out and that if he does anything about it I'll leave home, too! I can come close enough to it to throw a good scare into him. Now the thing for you to do is to go."

Springtime got to his feet slowly, incredulously, as though he could not believe in this freedom that had come so suddenly. He crossed the floor in three long, noiseless strides and looked out the door and up at the sky.

"And as for Johnny," said Kitty, "I have a scheme—a scheme for getting him home. We know he lives somewhere in this State where there's a ball team. We'll get a picture of him and send it around, and if his mother's alive, she'll see it and send for him. We can find out every town here that has a ball club in it and have the picture printed in the paper and a lot of publicity given to it. So you needn't worry about that."

Springtime looked at her and said slowly: "You're the most wonderful girl—"

"Good-by," said Kitty breathlessly, and held out her hand.

Springtime came back to her step by step, his face puzzled, for it had suddenly come over him that, much as he wanted to get away, it was not easy to leave Kitty behind him. Little by little the sweetness of her, her fresh beauty, had stolen in upon him and twisted in among his heartstrings so that now, with freedom before him, he stood looking stupidly down into the glorious brown eyes and fumbled for words.

"Kitty!" he said in a low voice. "Honey girl!"

Kitty's eyes did not waver, although they were misty.

"Springtime!" she whispered.

Then his arms went about her and drew her up so that she stood on tiptoe, and then

lips met in one binding kiss. With that kiss and with the firm young body within the circle of his arms, Springtime felt as though he had been neatly cut in two by a marvelously clean scimitar. One-half of him loved Kitty, adored her, would never be happy unless near her, and always miserable away from her; the other half of him was his wandering self, and even while he stood with Kitty's smooth cheek against his own, saying over and over again, "Kitty girl, I love you," and she murmured, "Springtime, my dear—my dear," that half of him rose strongly and told him that he was a wanderer, a hobo, unfit to be her husband; that he would never be able to keep her in gingham aprons, even, and that the best thing he could do would be to get out of that shed as fast as his legs would carry him.

After an indeterminate period of time, in which the sun spots moved across the floor and the mice came out and larked in the quiet, Kitty tilted her head back and, looking into Springtime's face, said: "Do you want to go—now?"

At the question he could not meet the luminous eyes, which, in spite of the great love for her which welled up in him, were somehow frightening. So he said nothing, and Kitty, smiling wisely, spoke with a lift of sheer joy in her voice:

"That's not real living, Springtime—just wandering from one place to another. Real life is in homes. I'm a fine little cook. Oh, it will be too wonderful!"

And Springtime could tell by the long breath she drew that for Kitty a home would be marvelous—the home he could not give her in a hundred years. He felt that long, sweet intake in a panic of cold misery. He tried to draw away from her, but such was the strength of his love that he could not.

"Honey," he said, "I couldn't possibly give you all that—never!"

"I'll take part," said Kitty; "a little at a time. When my grandfather married my grandmother they didn't have a thing. Guess what they paid the minister with!"

"Beans!" said Springtime with a prophetic groan.

"Yes," laughed Kitty, as full of joy as a

song sparrow. "They rode two on one horse to the minister with a sack of beans in front of the saddle. They had all they needed to make them happy, and before they died they were rich. And I don't want to be rich—that isn't what makes people happy, dear."

Springtime listened to her with a thrill of pure delight, but behind it was a dark duty to perform, and he said: "I couldn't give you even a part of it."

"Why not?" asked Kitty, with perfect trust which comes with a newly revealed love. "It isn't so hard."

"Don't you know what I am? I'm a man without a trade, without a cent to his name. All my life I've been roaming—I'm just a hobo."

Kitty put her hand over his mouth and stopped him.

"I won't have you saying such things about yourself! I've heard that word for the last time in my life. I've known what you were from the first—I've known you were a gentleman, no matter what you might be doing. And that's enough. You have good blood back of you, and ability, and I know—I just *know*—that you could do anything you could put your hand to. My dad thinks so, too, and he never makes mistakes. Isn't it wonderful!" she bubbled. "I don't even know your last name!"

"It's McLouth," said Springtime, laughing with her in spite of himself—"David McLouth. My father was a village doctor, and my uncle ran the store where I'm supposed to be now. I started there, but I couldn't stand it, and I began running away when I was fifteen—at first in the spring, every spring. That's how I got my moniker—I mean my nickname—because I always turned up on the road along in April. That's why they called me Springtime."

"It's a lovely name," said Kitty, and began trying over combinations: Mrs. David McLouth, Mrs. Springtime McLouth, and even plain Mrs. Springtime. "I'm always going to call you Springtime, and I think I'll have people call me Mrs. Springtime. That's wonderful."

They both saw how wonderful it was—so wonderful that there was nothing for him

to do but to draw Kitty up on her toes again and seal it with a kiss. There was another long spell of quiet, in which the mice ventured forth again, and then Kitty said dreamily:

"Dad will be pleased. He's queer—he likes men, and I'm sure he thinks more of you right now than of all the rest of us put together. I reckon you've got to be the son he ought to have had. I've done my best, and I've done a pretty good job, considering the handicap. He's crazy about you just the way he was about an old chap who lived next door to us. He and dad used to fish together, but when the old man died my poor pops moped for weeks."

Springtime took himself in hand and moved away from her, and, taking her by the wrists, looked down into the brown eyes with their russet glints.

"You listen," he said tensely, "because sooner or later you'll find out. I'm talking straighter to you than I've ever talked in my life. I'm just a plain footloose guy. I began running away when I was big enough to walk, and I've been running ever since. God knows what it is that keeps me moving, but something does—and it's the strongest thing in my life. I've tried to quit before, and I've sworn up and down I would, but sooner or later I'm off again. Kitty girl, I couldn't settle down—I'm afraid—not even for you!"

Saying that was the bravest thing Springtime had ever done—a thing compared to which fighting Gahagan was child's play. It stabbed him to the heart to hear her quick breath and to see her cheek pale, and he tried to draw her to him, but she held his gaze with one hand on his cheek.

"Springtime," she said slowly, "you do love me, don't you?"

"I do, Kitty. I do love you!"

"And I love you, and always shall. But I should think that if you loved me you would want to be with me. That's the way it is with me."

"Honey," he cried, "we've simply got to forget each other!"

"But that isn't so easy," said Kitty quietly. "Suppose I can't."

Springtime put his head in his hands and cursed himself silently.

Kitty slipped her hand to his shoulder and gripped it.

"I understand. I wouldn't be much if I didn't. Things will come out all right if we are only patient. You stay with us a while, just as long as you can stand it. And then when you *must* move, I'll let you go. And will you promise me just one thing?"

"Yes. God knows there is little enough I can do for you."

"All I ask is that you stay long enough to finish this—this job that dad has given you. Will you?"

"I will!" said Springtime, nodding solemnly. "So help me, Kitty, I'll try to finish these damn beans if it kills me!"

"It won't," said Kitty with a laugh. "They aren't so bad. All they take is—"

"Don't say it!" cried Springtime as he put up his hand. "That word 'patience' is the word I fight on!"

Kitty looked about her at the bins and the peck measures and the loose beans on the floor.

"How much have you done to-day?"

"Not a one."

Kitty walked firmly to the door and looked up at the sun.

"It must be about four now. We'll have about two hours to work in—you and I. Springtime, between us we're going to beat this game!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREAT IDEA.

OSBORNE let out a bellow when he found Kitty at work beside Springtime—such a bellow that she decided, under the circumstances, not to say anything, but to let Springtime carry on the great work by himself. For four days he worked hard—at least, it was hard work for him—and finished one bushel; then the realization that it would take him eighty days to do twenty bushels stopped him as neatly as a right hook to the jaw.

"Well, what's wrong with you?" asked Osborne as he came in one noon and found that the morning's work amounted to just nothing. "You look sick."

"I am sick! Do you know how long it will take me to do twenty bushels?"

"Oh, two or three hours."

"Eighty days!"

"Well, what of it? That isn't eternity.

People have done worse things. How do you suppose a woman feels about washing dishes day after day, year in and year out, and ironing, and all that sort of thing? Son, you don't know how lucky you are. How do you suppose a coal miner feels about getting down into a mine and working ten hours without seeing the light? You don't know what a cinch you have—good place to work, with plenty of light and air, good wages—"

Springtime jumped out of his chair as though he had been stung. He forced himself to be calm, however, and tried to make his voice sound pacific and reasonable.

"Let's you and me have a square talk.

I know you've got something on me—got it good and plenty. And I'm not soft enough to blame you for making use of it, because if I had anything on you—man, what I would do to you would be a caution! I didn't have anything to do with shooting holes in the top of your car, but that isn't the point, because you think I did, and you have a good case. More than one gun has gone up the river for less than that. I'm not wasting my breath telling you I'm innocent. All I want to know is, what are you going to do?"

When Springtime finished he was a bit ashamed of himself, for his voice had run away with him. Osborne's eyes had never shifted from him, and he felt that after all it must have been a rather kiddish exhibition.

"I guess you mean, what are *you* going to do?" said the old man smoothly. "Well, first you're going up to the house for lunch, and after that I can tip you off in just one word—beans."

Springtime, baffled, dug his fingers into his palms to keep himself from yelling, and did not move as Osborne walked toward the door. The old man waited for a full minute, then turned and roared: "Stir your stumps!"

Springtime had to follow—there was no getting away from it, Osborne had him.

Maybe the only thing that saved Osborne from personal assault as they moved toward the house was the fact that he did not look over his shoulder.

But he was an unaccountable man. After lunch he took Springtime for a long drive in the country—a drive that took most of the afternoon—and all that time his talk was man-to-man talk, with never a mention of the hard, white vegetables that waited for Springtime in the tin house. It was about horses, dogs, fights, politics, crops—without a word about McCabes, jails, or the fact that the young man with him was as much in his power as Prometheus in the power of the vulture.

When they returned Springtime was soothed, happy, almost indifferent, and though his feet dragged when he went to the bean shed he was able to sit down and work hard enough for an hour partly to fill a peck measure. Some of it he used to fill out the first bushel, for, as he looked at it, it seemed to be a rather skimpy one. He poured a few handfuls in, and then leveled it off until it was perfectly even with perhaps a slight swelling upward in the middle to show that if there were any error in measurement it was on the side of fullness rather than the other way.

Kitty came in as he was smoothing it off. When she saw what he was doing she said: "Springtime!"

The worker stood in front of his bushel, which it had taken five days to do, with nineteen bushels yet undone, and really felt a little pride in his work, and also with the undone bushels in his mind's eye, a little ashamed to be proud of it. But there was no doubt about Kitty—she was tremendously proud of him, and said so.

"It's wonderful!" she said. "Too marvelous for words! One whole bushel done!"

Springtime looked at it and shook his head with the melancholy pride that the old soldier feels at being under the worst top sergeant in the army.

"It wasn't so bad, now, was it?" coaxed Kitty. "It didn't kild you, after all, did it?"

"Close enough."

"But just think how much more fun it would have been if you had plowed for

them and harrowed and sowed the seed and harvested them. And then picked them over and sold them at something over the top price because they were the best beans ever raised. Wouldn't that have been fun?"

Springtime's wild half shouted an emphatic "No!" although the rest of him looked at Kitty and said "Yes." But he shook his head and waved his hand about at the beans which remained to be done.

"It took me four days to do that bushel, and then I haven't really done anything to-day. That means that it will take me a hundred days to do twenty bushels, or ninety-five days for the nineteen left that I have to do. Ninety-five days! That's over three months!"

"Nonsense!" said Kitty. "You'll get to be much slicker at it as time goes along, and then you'll work harder every day. I'll bet it won't take you a day over two months. Increased production—that's what you want, and you can get it, because people actually make money doing this, and they don't get anywhere near as good pay as dad is giving you."

"Do they all do it by hand?"

"I don't know—maybe not. I think in some big places they have machines of some kind, but they have to have people to run them, just the same. I never did get it quite straight—maybe the machines are for something else. But I mustn't stay and bother you. You get along to work, and in two months from now you'll have every last bean done."

"Two months!" exclaimed Springtime with feeling as he watched her go.

By that time it would be cold crossing the great divide, and it would be raining in California, but something told him that cold or no cold he would go. He stood for a long time, watching the door through which Kitty had gone, for she had left a seed which began to sprout, flourish, send out branches, and almost to bear fruit.

She had spoken of a machine—and there sprang up in his mind a full-grown picture of just the thing that he needed to get this business done in six days instead of sixty. If only there were a moving band now, something that went around on two rollers, a sort of endless belt on which the beans

would drop out of a hopper. That would help, for then as they went by one could simply knock off the undesirables, while the others fell into a basket at the end of the table.

Table? What table? Springtime whirled, and saw that his imagined machine had built it itself on just such a table as that before him. Going over to it, he inspected it. It was a simple flat top, with four legs, and if he could only find rollers that would go on each end he could arrange a belt which would go over the top of the table and under the bottom.

Something or somebody would have to turn it, but he could get a windmill or a motor or something; that point was a minor one. There flashed into his mind a picture of rollers—somewhere he had seen rollers, and he slapped his hand against his forehead and tried to recall. Rollers—where were rollers? Out the window! That was it—every time he had looked out of the window which had the best view he had looked on the wreck of a wringer.

He dashed out into the side yard and salvaged it from the junk heap—a ringer with two fairly good rollers and a crank. He saw that, with a few bolts, he could easily fix the rollers to ends of the table, and then somewhere he could find canvas with which to make his band that was to move on them.

Aflame with his new idea, he dashed into the harness room of the barn and found what tools he needed, and in addition a strip of awning which had evidently been cast aside as useless. It was full of holes, but there was enough canvas in it to make a belt.

In a tin tobacco can was a complete harness mending outfit—needles, thread and a thimble. All of them he took back into his shed, but just as he had dismembered the wringer he heard Osborne's feet crunching on the cinders, and he slipped out to the stable before his jailer could come on him and find what he was doing. The time to show it to Osborne was when it worked—not now. Luckily the old man did not offer to go into the bean shed, and when he asked Springtime how he was getting along the toiler replied: "Fine."

After supper he made a few cautious inquiries.

"I should think," he said, "that no man ought to do any work that a machine could do."

Osborne looked at him obliquely, and Springtime felt that the old man knew what he was driving at, but he kept his own face as bland as possible, so that instead of getting an insult he got a real opinion.

"You're right—as long as he can make a machine do it as well as the man does it. Remember this—that in America there's a big market for machine-made things, but people still pay the top price for the hand-made things. Americans want the best—more than the best. That's why you are always seeing hand-made shoes advertised, and hand-loomed cloths, and hand-picked beans. Americans want quality, and they will pay for it."

"But if the machine does it just as well and faster?"

"No objection at all," said Osborne. "But remember that people will still pay for the idea of a thing being hand worked, even if it isn't. And a man has to be a mite careful about advertising a thing as being hand made when it isn't."

Springtime said no more about his great idea for sorting beans by machine, but in the morning, for the first time, he sprinted to the shed. Within two hours he had made something of it—his rubbers were spinning smoothly, one on one end of the table and the other on the opposite.

Making the belt took longer, for it was a question of cutting and sewing, and that was a new sort of thing altogether. But by noon he had the belt moving on the rollers, and if it had not been for the fact that he did not want Osborne to drop in on him and see him working at this machine, he could have got that done by the time the noon whistle at the plow works blew. He waited for the old man at the stable entrance, and when Osborne inquired how he was getting along he answered him in his most cheerful manner.

It was a great moment when, with a small packing box nailed to the table for a hopper, he turned the crank and saw the

beans moving past him in a broad stream. He made the band revolve with one hand and picked out the dark beans with the other, and even in that awkward way, he could see that he was working faster than he could by hand. If only he had some one to turn the crank now.

All the afternoon he worked on improvements, such as hollowing the rollers slightly so that the load on the belt would not crawl off the edges, and narrowing the slit in the packing box so that the beans would slip out onto the band in a layer just one deep. When they were piled on top of each other, the whole scheme went wrong. He left it just before five, as perfect as he could make it, and went out to wait for Osborne in front of the stable, for the time was not yet ripe to show it to his jailer. He had to have some one to turn the crank for him while he sorted the load; he had no money and the only prospect he had of getting labor was from Durkin. After supper he slipped out to find the mission where Durkin was staying.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONVERT.

LIKE all good towns Napoleon had a good section and a section which was not so good. Of course the railroad was the dividing line, and Springtime struck across the tracks to find the Star of Life Mission.

Napoleon, with no factories beyond the plow works, had a very small slum quarter, and that slum quarter would have been, in many towns, a good residential section. Springtime wondered what the Star of Life Mission could find to work with, for the people seemed to be well-dressed, healthy, and contented. As a matter of fact, the Star of Life Mission had been founded more for the benefit of the people who ran it than the people to be saved.

"If there are no worthy objects of charity," one good woman is reported as saying, "what will become of Good Works?"

Good Works there must be, and certain of Napoleon's citizens who had the money to gratify such a hobby had founded the

Star of Life Mission across the railway tracks and were on the hunt for converts.

Springtime saw the electric sign winking and soon found himself entering what had once been a store building. The windows were frosted, except for a big red star painted in the middle of each. Within the counters had been cleared out, giving a big floor space covered with common chairs, all arranged to face a platform, on which stood a sort of reading desk. Close before it and slightly raised above the level of the floor was a bench, and on that bench sat Durkin, the great man, with his head bowed and his shoulders stooped, every line of his figure expressing contrition, regret, and an earnest hope that he might enter into a better life as soon as the tall, thin man above him stopped praying over him.

Springtime slipped into a seat, holding his cap tight over his mouth to keep down the laughter that always bubbled up when Durkin was on any of his great schemes. He glanced about him and saw that there were perhaps a dozen people, old and young, in the chairs; that there were far corner rooms behind glass doors; that there were a number of big stoves in the mission.

Take it all in all, that wouldn't be a bad place to live, but it was really a bit below Durkin to try to get a job as janitor in such a place, for that seemed to be the line of action which he had planned. Of course, a man could get clothing there and food for a limited number of days, but Durkin seemed to be full of admiration for the small town, and not only ready, but glad to settle down in it for good.

That could mean only one thing—he was planning to become a hanger-on of the Star of Life Mission, either a perpetual exhibition as fruit of its work, or janitor.

A feeling soprano during the hymn that followed the prayer drew the wanderer's eyes to a plump woman who sat in the very front row of seats. Springtime could not see much of her beyond the fact that her smooth coils of hair were comely; that her cheek was young, and that the nape of her neck was extremely white. She sang with her head up, and whenever she struck a rich, high note, a long quiver ran through Durkin, and he groaned.

When the hymn was over Durkin got slowly and dramatically to his feet, stepped up to the platform, and threw out his hand. The rest of the audience, including Springtime, sat with its head up and its ears pinned back, so to speak, anticipating something delicious; that comely woman bowed her head and covered her eyes with her hands.

Durkin tipped his head back and fixed his eyes on a point just above the transom in the high door where he seemed to see something of thrilling importance. When he spoke his voice was hollow and low and full of feeling.

"Friends," he said, "I want to tell you to-night what the Star of Life Mission has done for me. I want to tell you how wicked I was and how lost in the ways of evil until a kind friend took me by the hand and showed me a better way."

Here his eyes descended for a moment from the point above the transom to the bowed woman at his feet. "Friends, I have been wicked—no one knows but me and the Powers above and the powers below how bad I have been. If I should bare this black soul to you, you would all recoil from me—recoil as at the sight of a serpent with its head raised and its fangs bared!"

A shudder from some, and loud cries from others.

"I have been a drunkard and a gambler and a bearer of false witness—night after night I have rolled besotted in the gutter. Day after day I have sat at the table with wild companions and listened to the clink of gambler's gold. Not so long ago I was tempted—I undertook to do a thing for my neighbor and gave him my solemn promise to do it, and his enemy came and stood at my side and said: 'Do not this thing, and I will give you the wherewithal to buy silks and satins and fine raiment, and wines and strong drinks.'

"And I hearkened to him, friends, but before I could accomplish my wicked intent, another came and stood at my right hand and told me not to do it. I had a glimpse then of a good angel watching me, and I could not do it. And I went to the traducer and said: 'I cannot do your devil's work for you.'"

Tremulous cries came from the audience—cries of gladness that Durkin had been saved from sin. Durkin brought his gaze down again to the woman at his feet, who was sobbing outright.

Springtime sat with his head bowed in his hands as it came over him that this embroidered story had its beginning in the attempt to throw the great Hanover-Napoleon ball game. He had known that Durkin was good, but he had not known how good, and as he struggled with his laughter he saw a delicious picture of himself and the convert traveling the rest of their days together, and recalling at least once a day this scene in the Star of Life Mission. He knew that Durkin was lazy, but he knew that he was harmless, too fastidious to let himself roll in any gutter, and never having enough money on him to gamble much.

"The mark of Cain is on my brow," said Durkin in a terrible voice, "or would have been if my hand had not been stayed miraculously. I have wandered in the Valley of Darkness, friends, and I would be there now if heaven had not sent a guide to put my feet into the path of right living. I have drunk deep—I have coveted my neighbor's house and lot, my tongue has been soiled with profanity, and—"

He stopped and threw himself back on the mourner's bench while shouts of thanksgiving over him and a hymn arose spontaneously. That hymn led to another, and the meeting came to its close with Springtime beginning to see the light. Durkin, without the adornment which his smooth tongue had given him, would not have been half as interesting. If he had been a common drunk people would have passed him by, but no one can ignore a really bad man.

Springtime joined in the hymns lustily, for he liked a rousing tune as all good wanderers do, and when everything was over he drifted forward in an attempt to see Durkin. There was a ring around the sinner which he could not break through; Durkin was the one who broke it, and as he came down the aisle with his hat in his hand, that same comely woman who had sat in the front row was on his arm.

Springtime had a good look at her and

approved Durkin's taste; she was blue-eyed, with a skin like rose petals, flushed, just now, to a deep color by her recent weeping. Durkin looked full at Springtime, and the latter was in a panic for a moment for fear the great man would drag him forward as a fit subject for conversion. But Durkin, while looking at him, made absolutely no sign of recognition; Springtime understood, and as the two went down the street, he followed at a distance.

They crossed the tracks to the good side of town, and not only to the good side of town, but to the best part of the good side. They stopped at the gate of a comfortable house standing far back from the street—a place as solid and substantial as government bonds. Springtime whistled faintly to let Durkin know that he was waiting for him and loitered under a tree until he heard the slamming of a door, then stepped out to meet Durkin. He fell into step with him, and the two walked down into the business section without saying a word.

The change in Roller's pal was complete; he was no longer Durkin, the hobo, but Thomas Durkin, gentleman, and although there had not been much of an actual change in his clothes beyond the new shoes, tie, and collar he looked the gentleman from head to foot. He walked the street with a faintly possessive and patronizing air, as if, although he might not be mayor, he was at least a heavy taxpayer with an interest in pavements and street lights. He stopped to look in at the windows of merchandise as though there were nothing that it was not within his power to buy.

When they came to the station park, where there were secluded benches under trees, Durkin led the way to the darkest of them and lighted a cigarette. He settled back with one long leg crossed over the other and drew a luxurious inhalation that seemed to go to his very toes. Springtime was delicately silent; if Durkin wanted to let him into his secret, he would in his own good time. A secret current of sympathy ran between them, and when their cigarette ends burned bright they turned to look into one another's faces.

"Good old Springtime," said Durkin finally, "what's up? Do your feet itch?"

"They do, bad, man, they do!"

"Why don't you drift? If you want to go—perhaps it would be as well not to wait for me. If you were holding off on my account—"

"I can't go," said Springtime bitterly; "I can't."

Durkin finished his cigarette thoughtfully and lighted another.

"Some one must have something on you, old chap," he said. "I can't see what else would be keeping you here."

Springtime sketched in brief but telling language the history of his relations with Tom Osborne, and at the end of that vivid recital Durkin whistled.

"He's got you, son. It's a peach. If he were a percentage copper now he could shake you down for the rest of your life, and you would have to come through. He could frame you for the pen in just ten seconds. And all the old boy asks is that you pick over twenty bushels of beans. He must be a nut, but you don't know your own luck, my boy, for when it comes to a choice between living in a good house and picking over a few beans and living in a jail and breaking rock, there is really just one answer—just one."

Springtime spoke of his need of a helper to turn the crank of his bean machine, but Durkin shook his head.

"Springtime, I make it a rule never to go back. I passed that sort of work years ago; as a matter of fact, I can say that I never began it. You know how actors are—if they have had a job at fifty a week, they'll starve before they will take one on at forty-nine. That's me; and I think it is a profoundly right attitude."

"I've got to have somebody," said Springtime, "and I haven't any money and no way of making anybody do it. Boy, wouldn't I like to have something on old Osborne! I'd make him turn that crank the rest of his life!"

Durkin ran his hands through all of his pockets and brought out a few small silver pieces.

"There's every cent I have," he said; "every solitary cent and it's yours if you need it. I've a little in prospect, but it won't materialize very quickly. That fifty

I got at the ball game—Springtime, sometimes I think it's a mistake to have too many people about you who believe in you. I really had to do something for the lads at the railroad house. I will have to go without smokes, but maybe I can scrounge some off the loafers around the station until I can get some more."

"No, thanks, all the same," said Springtime, and pushed the hand away that offered what Durkin had.

They sat for a time in silence until a clock struck; then Durkin arose and stretched himself.

"No late hours at the Star of Life," he said. "I have to be in on time. Well, keep a stiff upper lip, Springtime, and come to see me again soon."

Springtime watched Durkin stroll away with a queer feeling of strangeness. Durkin had stayed over to save him, but he had said nothing about rescue work that night; in fact, had advised him to drift on without waiting for him. There was something in the wind; what it was he could not say, except that it as bound to be good, for there was about all of Durkin's operations just that little super touch which lifted them up into the realm of genius.

He went back to Osborne's house, still not knowing where he could get any one to turn his crank. He had thought of Kitty, but ruled her out at once for the reason that he wanted to surprise her, and the triumph would be just that much greater if he could get the thing going on his own initiative. He had also thought of Johnny, but there were many reasons why Johnny would not do except as a last resort; he doubted whether or not the lad would stick, and Johnny was too easily amused. He would probably find the whole situation very funny and would, since he was the almost constant companion of old Osborne, peddle his amusement to the old man. Osborne had enough on him as it was.

He found Johnny sitting on his bed with some new treasures spread out before him: a knife with every known kind of blade in it, a half ball of blue chalk, a small phial of quicksilver, a book on sleight-of-hand and another on "How to Play Shortstop."

"Gee, lamp this junk, Springtime!" he

said. "The old man gave it all to me. This funny stuff in the bottle brings dead people up out of the water. You bake it in a loaf of bread and then float it in the pond or river or whatever it is, and it brings 'em right up to the surface. That old boy's a card, Springtime; he's as regular a guy as ever breathed."

"Ah-huh!" said Springtime.

He was wondering what the chances were of getting Johnny to turn his crank, and looking at the bright, restless face he concluded that they were small. Johnny, who was as neat as a cat, brought out a little bundle of things wrapped up in oiled silk and untied it to put in it his two new books. He tiptoed to the door and listened and then came back to the bed, quivering with suppressed laughter.

"I've sure been giving that Jane of yours a swell time," he said in a whisper. "She asked me if she couldn't have a picture of me to put up on her mirror along with her other beaus, and I said sure she could, but I didn't have any. So she allowed she'd take one, and asked me to come out on the lawn and pose for it. I went along, and she backed me up against the shrubbery and got the sun just right, but just before she clicks the box I yanked my cap down over my face. She must think I'm green to let anybody mug me that way."

All the time Johnny had been telling about this scene, in which Springtime recognized Kitty's plan to have the boy's picture broadcasted, he had been working on his bundle, and in that miscellaneous lot Springtime saw what was probably the only picture of Johnny—one which the Professor had taken on the fair grounds. The lad was posing as the checker marvel, with his medal and a checker board in front of him.

"She tries it again," said Johnny, "and that time I made such a darned face that you couldn't have told whether it was me or a monkey. 'Why, Johnny,' she says, 'I don't believe you want me to have a picture of you.' I told her I sure did and that I'd be a good boy, and so she tries it again, and that time I turned plunk around just as the thing went off, so she got nothing but the back of my head. After that I couldn't think of any other way to side-step it, so I

beat it. She lets on she's pretty sore about it, but what the hell! What a boob I'd be to let anybody get my map into a picture!"

"I went to a Sunday school picnic the other day with the missis and they took a picture of the whole crew. I sneaked off into the brush, but some guy came pelting after me and got me and led me back by the ear. But when the time comes for the guy to squeeze the bulb I just ducks around behind a fat girl and nobody's the wiser. If a guy's cagey there's nothing he can't slip over on these hicks."

"Yes," said Springtime, "you're one wise kid."

And he marked just which corner of which drawer Johnny used for the hiding place of his property. The lad had to go home, and by fair means or foul he intended to get that picture and have it copied, then broadcasted. Johnny lay down and pulled the blankets up over him and was instantly on the verge of sleep.

"Say, kid," said Springtime, "how about doing a little work for me?"

"Can't," said Johnny in a sleepy but prompt negative.

"Why not?"

"The old man won't let me. He said if you asked me to help you to tell you to go to the devil."

That settled that.

CHAPTER XXI.

HIGH FINANCE.

THAT picture of Johnny as a checker playing marvel was in Kitty's hands early the next morning. Within an hour it was back in Johnny's kit, but in that hour it had been copied by a photographer, and Kitty had arranged a plot which seemed to have fair prospects of beating Johnny at his own game of wariness.

"I know a man on the newspaper here," said Kitty with her eyes snapping, "and I told him about this wonderful checker-playing boy and that I had a picture of him. He said it would make a good feature article for some kind of syndicate he writes for and that he would certainly like a chance to try

his hand at it. And I told him to go ahead and blessed him for it, and finally I told him the whole story on the promise that he would print only as much of it as we wanted printed. He said he was sure it would be printed in every town that was anywhere big enough to have a ball team. I told him that it would not be wise to say anything about this being a runaway boy, and he said it was taking all the punch out of the narrative, but he would go ahead and write it and that it would be printed within a few days."

"But not in this town's paper," said Springtime: "if that boy got wind of it he'd slip out of our hands like water."

"I thought of that," said Kitty, "and he said he could arrange that, too. Isn't it wonderful?"

It was wonderful, for Johnny had long ago ceased to be only amusing to Springtime and had become a worry, for always in the back of his mind was the picture of old Bender as he had commissioned him to convoy the lad home. He accosted Osborne as the latter was leaving the stable for his office and related the plot to him.

"I'll bet the little devil beats you," was the old man's comment. "Do you want to make a sporting proposition of it?"

"No, thanks, but if you'll step out to this beanery for a minute I'll show you something."

Osborne followed, and Springtime, with the palpitating heart of a mother showing her first child to an audience of critical relatives, explained the mechanism.

"You fill this box this way, and when the crank turns the belt moves and carries the beans along in front of the operator. You knock the bad ones out this way. It's a cinch. I reckon I can work about ten times as fast this way as the old way, and I swear to heaven that the beans that drop off this end are as white as that china egg you are always talking about. There won't be a dark one in the lot."

He went on volubly and passionately, for he knew that it lay in the old man's power to scrap the whole thing and set him back to working by hand. If he did, something would happen that there would be a revolt in the shed and that the consequences to Os-

borne might be more or less permanent disfigurement, and to himself, more or less permanent confinement in the county jail. Perhaps Osborne sensed what was in the air, and did not make any disparaging comment. He took the handle, turned it, ran his hands over the rollers and the moving band and finally said: "Let's see you do some work on it. I'll turn the crank."

Springtime poured a few beans into the hopper and Osborne began to turn carefully. Never had the inventor worked with more concentration, for he knew that if one or two dark-colored beans slipped past him, the invention went into the discard. One dark one would spell defeat. At the end of five minutes Osborne stopped turning and rubbed his chin.

"Well, I don't like the idea, but that may be because I'm getting out of date. It seems to work and as long as it does, I don't see just what I can do about it. But how are you going to make it turn? You can't crank it with one hand and pick beans with the other."

"That's the hell of it," said the inventor. "I thought maybe I could get some work somewhere for a day or two until I'd earned enough to pay a helper."

Osborne shook his head slowly.

"I don't fancy the idea of your working anywhere else," he said. "The thing for you to do is to float a loan. Do you believe in this machine?"

"Sure I do!"

"Every fool inventor believes in his machine, but so does every good inventor. Have you ever seen the boys with their wave machines in California—hundreds of 'em selling stock to harness the waters and they all believe that they have the secret? But, gosh! I wouldn't believe in a man who wasn't strong for his own ideas, even if they were bad ones, any more than I would believe in a man who wasn't strong for his own kids, even if they looked like the devil."

"Of course," said Springtime. "I might go down the main stem and batter for a few light pieces."

"Yes, you could! McCabe would be on your neck in no time, and if he missed you, I wouldn't. The thing for you to do is to

look at this thing as a business proposition. I'm ready to consider this—I have never refused to listen to a man who had something to sell in which he did believe, and you might draw a lesson from that. I'll see you at the bank at"—he took a red-covered book from his pocket and consulted it—"at twenty minutes to ten," he said. "I can give you ten minutes then."

Springtime did not dare to laugh, although there was something comic in the seriousness of the old man. Why couldn't he hand over a five or so and let it go at that? But Osborne was full of queer tricks—he was as fond of playing games as any boy, and probably this was another of his games. He might get to the bank and find that the old man wasn't there, or some other equally crude, practical joke. All the same, if the old man was serious, there was a thrill in the thought that he believed his invention good enough to bother with it.

Another improvement occurred to him as he waited for twenty minutes to ten to roll around. It would be much better to have the beans flow past him in a narrow, rapid stream than in a broad, slow stream. It would be ideal to get them into single file, where he could knock off the offenders with a stick as a machine gun would knock over a file of soldiers. The product would be purer. He narrowed the opening in his hopper and put in two slanting pieces of wood so that the contents of the box would slide down to the orifice.

This took him so long that when he swung in under the severe Doric entrance of the Napoleon National Bank he saw by the big clock on the sidewalk that he was five minutes late. That did not worry him, for the reason that he was not a business man and had not much sympathy with business methods. Besides, it was all more or less of a joke, anyway—this bringing him to a bank to borrow a five or so.

Inside the door he looked about him, and immediately felt somewhat chastened. The lobby was a big, open space done in cream-colored stone and lighted from above by an amber skylight. The customers moved quietly and solidly; behind their wickets the clerks were equally quiet and gave a feeling of tremendous efficiency, and

the clink of coin and the whisper of paper gave a hint of power which suddenly made Springtime feel small, embarrassed, and out of place. Instinctively he reached to take off his hat, and then seeing that other men had theirs on, he let his stay where it was.

At his right and left were small open spaces separated from the rest of the bank by low ornamental railings. Within these spaces were open-topped mahogany desks, and behind one he saw the globular figure of Osborne. Springtime swung up to the railing and said, in spite of the crushing effect of the bank interior: "Well, here I am, boss."

The old man did not look up from the intent perusal of a stamped paper which Springtime guessed was a mortgage. His gold-rimmed spectacles were far down on his nose, and his shrewd eyes were almost shut in the concentration which he poured upon a canceled paper which was not worth a split second's attention. That heavy piece of paper was camouflage; Osborne was intent upon driving home a lesson upon his outlaw employee, and it was not until Springtime had stood there for a full three minutes in which the quietness of the bank began to tell heavily upon his hobo impudence, that he looked up and peered at the clock under the mural decoration showing the Arts of Peace overcoming the Arts of War.

"You're late," he said gravely. "I can give you only six minutes. You will have to work fast. Come in."

He leaned forward and slipped the catch on the bronze gateway so that his client could enter. The inventor took his place in a deep chair that faced Osborne; he sat with one leg cocked up and his cap dangling from his knees. It was an attitude that looked comfortable, but the young man was feeling far from that.

"You want to float a loan?" said Osborne in the same grave tone. "Can you give me more particulars?"

"Ah, you know what I want," said Springtime; "if I can get hold of a few bones so that I can hire somebody to turn the crank I get them done just that much faster. If I can't I do 'em by hand and they never get done. That's all. If you

want to stake me, fork over a couple of berries and I'll have them done in a week."

Osborne looked at him so intently, so coolly that Springtime's grin became rather vacuous.

"Have you any security to offer?"

"No. Except that when I get five bushels done, the next one will be mine. That was the arrangement."

"When you get four bushels done," corrected Osborne, "I said I would give you one bushel out of every fire. However, I hardly think that could be called security, for I have a first lien on at least part of that for your board bill. You have been working so slowly that you have gone behind. You are right in trying to float a loan, but a man who wants to borrow money must offer some security, so that in case he fails to make good, the innocent lender will not be the sufferer. Have you anything else?"

"Nothing but my clothes. I guess it's settled; I'll be drifting back to work."

"Just a minute. Lots of men borrow money without any more security than you have to offer. There would be very little business done if people on both sides didn't take a chance once in a while, and when you come right down to it industry and honesty are assets just as much as houses and land—more so. That's why England is top dog in finance and Russia isn't. There are a half dozen men in this community who are running their automobiles—own 'em, too—to whom I wouldn't lend a cent. And there are a half dozen men here who have nothing but health, industry, and honesty to whom I have loaned anything from five to five thousand dollars. You understand that such loans, of course, are not made by savings banks. Institutions like this one must have assets that can be easily liquidated. I'm always willing personally to gamble on a man with push and honesty—largely from the standpoint of its being a public service. That's the kind of man that builds up a town. He's a greater asset without one cent than a loafer is with a million he didn't earn."

Springtime, who had been following with keen interest, shook his head. "That lets me out. I'm not industrious—"

"And maybe not honest," said Osborne smoothly.

"As long as I work by hand I'll be in debt to you," returned Springtime, "and not only in debt, but getting deeper and deeper all the time. I've seen some grading camps where it worked the same way—you didn't get enough money, no matter how hard you worked, to pay off your board bill at the end of the week. There was only one way to handle that situation, and that was to take a chance and shift and then you had a good prospect of getting in jail. I'm not fast enough to keep up with my board bill, and unless I speed up production I get nothing out of it, and neither will you in the end."

A delighted grin flashed for a moment on Osborne's face.

"Listen to the boy," he said with a return to what might be called his stable manner, "talking about speeding up production. Now I'll tell you something else about business. Once in a while—once in a great while it pays to throw good money after bad—but, mind, I'm not saying that this is one of those times. You know the old wheeze about how the Indian found his lost arrow—he shot another in the same direction and watched it fall. Once in a while he probably lost both—generally he found both. But we aren't Indians. I'll waive any claim to the first sack of beans—but if I advance any money it will be just enough to get you past that first sack. That's yours to do as you darn please with, and I'll confess I'm a bit curious to know just what you would do with it. Just how much would it take to get you past that first sack?"

Springtime did a bit of rapid calculating based on what he considered would be his producing power once he had his machine going in proper form.

"Ten hours," he said. "I have one bushel done already and I'm sure I could do four more with that machine in ten hours, counting out time for repairs, improvements, and adjustments. I don't know what wages I would have to pay."

"Fifteen cents an hour," said Osborne with a smoothness which should have warned Springtime. "That's enough for

anybody. That would make a dollar and a half for ten hours—just one dollar and a half more than I'm willing to risk on you. As a panhandler you may be a great man, but as a business risk you're a scream. The only thing for you to do is to get back there and get to work. You've spent more time now over a bushel than a one-armed blind man would spend over ten. Good day!"

He arose and swung open the little gate, and Springtime, speechless with rage, crowded up to him with his fists balled. Osborne put a hand on his arm and said: "Easy, now, you aren't talking to some old b'ndle stiff who couldn't put up a fight."

Springtime stepped slowly out, eye to eye, with his tormentor. "Why I don't slam you," he grated, "is beyond me!"

"Ah," said Osborne, putting up a thick forefinger, "there's a reason. This one's named McCabe." Then with a chuckle he turned back to his desk and Springtime walked to the street.

Even while he had been in the bank there had been a change in the weather. The wind had shifted to the northwest and there was a scurry of gray clouds over the roof-

tops. That wind was biting; people bowed their heads to it, but Springtime sniffed it hungrily, for it brought to him the same summons that it brought to the wild geese—the mysterious call to be moving. There would be fairy ice on the ponds to-morrow morning—that wind freshened his longing until it burned like a spruce bough, and in that flame he forgot all about the scene that had just passed in the bank.

He began to walk rapidly and heedlessly, but he was bound more strongly than he knew. There was McCabe and there was Kitty; the former kept him away from the railroad tracks and the latter drew him back toward his pen. Within five minutes that flame subsided into a sullen glow and he was standing outside his shed, miserable, homesick for he knew not what, almost without the courage to pull himself into that shed and take up his dull task of sorting beans by hand. He pushed open the door slowly and stepped across the threshold and saw Kitty standing by his machine and turning the handle slowly. She looked up as he entered and the light of pure adoration flamed up in her eyes.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



HE KNOWS A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN GET IT.

HE isn't a king who has fled from his throne;

He isn't a freak, you can bet it:

He hasn't a flat where he lives all alone

And is trying his best to sublet it.

He's not a new millionaire giving away

His fortune as soon as he met it—

Then why all the crowd flocking round him, you say?

He knows a place where you can get it!

Oh, he has more power than kaiser or king,

And men rush to offer him credit;

If he cannot warble, if he cannot sing,

His whistle—he knows how to wet it.

His hobby's his own and there's none to deny;

They let him caress it and pet it,

For he is the chap who knows where, when and why,

And how to go somewhere and get it!

Miles Overholt.



Showing the Widow

By JACK BECHDOLT

HORATIUS ALGERNON McFALL, the undisputed champion cook of all the big timber camps lying north of the Oregon State line and west of the Cascade Mountains, listened to the appeal of two old friends with grave, sad face and an eye moistened by sympathy. Horatius was as big in person as he was famed in the culinary art, and the heart in his bosom was proportioned to his great girth and height—a mighty heart, as tender as his own pie crusts. The words of Bruce Ray and Wally Newell touched that heart to its core.

"We come to you, Horatius" Ray explained gravely, "because you know women. You understand the sex. You've already been married, ain't you, old-timer?"

"Five times," McFall acknowledged with a deep sigh. "My last two died on me."

"There you are!" Ray turned to his

friend Newell with triumph in his gaze. "Didn't I tell you, Wally? Five times! If he ain't able to advise us, who can?"

"Well, Horatius had ought to know, for a fact," Newell admitted.

"Gents," said Horatius in his clear, mild voice so oddly at variance with his height and girth, "do I understand that your troubles revolves about and centers in, so to speak, one of the fair sex? In other words, did you come to consult me about a lady?"

"We did," Newell admitted glumly.

"A little red-haired lady," his partner supplemented with a hopeful look.

Horatius shook his head sagely, pursing his lips ere he delivered judgment. "No. It can't be done! The man that understands 'em ain't yet been born. I say it that's led five to the altar."

"He's right," Newell agreed quickly. "Didn't I try to warn you, Bruce—"

"But, hell, Wally, he ain't heard the

story yet! How can he be right? Look here, McFall, here's Wally and me, two of your old tilikums, come to you and askin', man to man, for the sake of old times, will you lend us a helpin' hand? And even before you hear what we got to say, you go turn us down. I ask you, is that right and fair?"

"No, Bruce, I don't turn you down," Horatius protested. "The claims of friendship, when put forward by two old-timers like you and Wally, is something no man can deny. When I look about me on this here old raft camp of Old Man Morris's, and recall to my mind's eye the scenes of a bygone day when us old-timers lived the lives of men and not mere puppets in the hands of blind and unrelenting fate, I find them claims twined round my heart like the everlasting ivy. No, gents, I don't turn you down; but I warn you if it's about women—"

"Just one, Horatius! Just one lady, and she ain't any bigger'n Wally, there—ain't even as big. Just one red-haired, lone, lorn woman—"

"I warn you, Bruce, size don't cut no figure with a woman—"

"A lone, lorn widow lady, Horatius—"

"Bruce, widows are the worst of all!"

"Well, my godfrey, Horatius! Will you help us? Will you help Wally and me, or won't you? Here we're in a peck of trouble and askin' your advice!"

"I'll help you, Bruce, so far as mortal man can do. I'm at your disposal, gents. Shoot the story!"

II.

OLD MAN MORRIS shut down his logging camps two years ago, when the bottom dropped out of the timber market. The raft camp on Klahowya Bay, where this conference took place, had been boarded up, abandoned to the weather and the gradual encroachment of the forest. Bunk-houses showed blind windows. The steam donkey engine was crated. The overhead cable hung idle and its pulley blocks dripped tears of rust.

Weeds and ferns and young trees grew high over heaps of discarded equipment. The fallers and swampers and boom tenders

had drifted far and wide. The tugboats were laid up in tidal creeks and their crews dispersed like last year's dead leaves, driven by the winds of adversity. Only Horatius Algernon McFall was left. He held the job of camp watchman.

Of all the heroic figures of the old days, McFall saw but two any more. These were Wally Newell and Bruce Ray, who had been bunkies so long that old habit and affection held them together in the adventures of idleness. Even before the days of national prohibition Wally and Bruce had begun saving money. As loggers go they were rated men of considerable means, and for the past two years had been getting what enjoyment an active man can hope for from a life of leisure.

The summer and winter resort hotel of Honest John Burke was situated on Skookum Inlet, not more than seven miles from the abandoned logging camp. As guests of Honest John's hotel, Wally and Bruce had met the red-haired, diminutive lady who troubled them—the dashing Mrs. Kitten McCoy, who was summering at the resort. And Wally Newell had lost his heart to the widow.

Bruce Ray, who was almost four inches taller than six feet, explained this with deadly seriousness. His mahogany-hued face glistened with dew brought out by eloquence and the effort to be lucid. His large flaxen mustache drooped and his keen blue eyes implored Horatius Algernon McFall's attention, while with his big, crook-fingered hands dangling below round, shiny, starched cuffs, he gestured impressively.

"Look at him!" Bruce exclaimed. "Look at Wally! Ain't he a man any woman should be proud to mate with?"

Wally, who came about to Bruce's shoulder and looked no thicker through than the big man's thigh, sighed dejectedly. Once he had been the undisputed boss boom tender of Old Man Morris's camp, a bear-cat log spinner and victor against all comers, and the chain-lightning terror of many an old-time barroom fight.

Time and love had transformed him. He was clad now in a tight-fitting costume of bright blue, wore long-pointed linen collars, flaming cravats, white socks, and Oxfords

embroidered with innumerable stenciled patterns that looked like colenders.

Wally sighed heavily.

"How any sane woman could pass up a he-man like Wally for one of these here washed-out, baldheaded, knock-kneed shoe drummers from Seattle is what gets me!" Wally's friend growled. "The boss boom tender of Puget Sound, and I told her so, too."

"Then, gents, I take it there's competition in this here tournament for a lady's favor?" Horatius inquired.

"There is! That's why we come to you, Horatius. My godfrey, Wally and me has done everythin' two men could do to win that woman—"

"But, good gosh, Bruce—you don't both aim to win her! You can't, not in this country."

"Both? Hell, no! It's Wally wants to marry her, I'm tellin' you. Naturally, though, I'm doin' what I can, ain't I? Wally and me being tilikums all this time. And we worked every dodge we know, Horatius. We took it in shifts. When Wally come off the job I begun, settin' out on the porch with her, takin' her for walks, tellin' her about Wally and what a husband he'd make for some lucky girl. Why, I even dance with her!

"Then, when I'm played out, Wally goes back on watch again, and shows the lady all his good points. Look at his clothes! Wouldn't you think his clothes alone would soften her heart? And his dancin'—we spent fifty dollars with Sid Wilcox, Honest John's son-in-law that teaches dancin' in the city, to get him learned all the fancy new steps. And yet she shows she thinks more of this here Addison Foster—this shoe drummer that's got a wall eye and dyspepsia!"

"But, Bruce, what can I do about it?" Horatius puzzled.

"We thought if you'd come look over the lady—" Wally suggested hopefully.

Bruce took the words out of his mouth.

"Yes, Horatius, if you'd just come over to Honest John's and give her kind of an expert's survey, like. You havin' had five of 'em had ought to know a lot about women. Maybe you could tell if you saw

her and talked with her, just what's wrong with us. Maybe you could map out some way we could work so's her eyes would be opened to her mistake and she'd see Wally in his real lights."

"You'd be kind of like that ee-ficiency engineer Old Man Morris used to have to show him how to run his camp better," Wally interposed.

"It wouldn't take long, Horatius! And whilst you was at Honest John's me and Wally'd pay all expenses."

"Our skiff is down on the beach now," Wally explained.

"And it's only an hour's row—"

"All expenses, Horatius. Maybe you'd enjoy a hotel for a day or so—"

"For the sake of old times, Horatius! It's a small thing to ask—"

"And you understand women. What say?"

Horatius said: "Gents, I can't refuse. I ain't got the heart! We'll have a look at this here widow lady."

III.

EVERY summer resort has its seasonal belle. Even Honest John Burke's very modest hotel at Skookum Inlet was no exception to this rule. Its guests included ten women, several of them unmarried. The married women were joined over the week ends by their husbands who came from the city, and the unmarried ones by fathers and brothers and sweethearts—all except Mrs. Kitten McCoy, who had no husband or father to join her, and who recruited her sweethearts on the spot.

During the week, because of the arrangement, there were but three men available as cavaliers. They were Wally Newell, Bruce Ray and Addison Foster, the shoe salesman. Kitten McCoy appropriated all three, which made her about as popular as rat poison with the other women. Nevertheless, she did it, for in that field she showed more class, more charm, more of that come-hither that grips the fancy of the unattached man, than any of her competitors.

Mrs. McCoy was a little woman, and if you believed the whisperers on Honest John's porch she had kissed good-by to her

thirty-fifth birthday some time ago. But she didn't show signs of it. She was little and slight, yet plump enough, too. Her hair was a golden red and curled profusely even in damp weather. Her eyes were brown and merry, and she had dimples.

When the subject of his investigations and consideration was pointed out to Horatius Algernon McFall, the ex-cook looked queer. He studied her with covert glances through the evening meal, and when later he saw her in a dancing frock, cut low and short in the sleeves and skirt, and generally summerish and cool, he looked more startled than ever.

The day of McFall's advent chanced to be Saturday, and the guests held an informal dance in the hotel parlor on Saturday nights with a phonograph as an orchestra. McFall was presented to the widow by Bruce Ray, and Bruce left them after nudging his big friend significantly.

"I been thinking, ma'am," said McFall, "that you and me must have met somewhere before?"

"Oh, Mr. McFall, how romantic!" The brown-eyed widow cuddled closer to Horatius and rolled her glance upward in a manner calculated to do most damage. "But I can't remember you," she added. "I meet so many people."

McFall frowned in an effort to recollect. "It come over me strong when I saw you come out in that dress," he murmured. "I got a feeling it must be so. Somehow I associate you with Australia—"

"Were you ever in Australia?"

"No, ma'am, I never was. And yet—"

"Neither was I. But perhaps it's an affinity! Perhaps our psychic auras harmonize. Oh, Mr. McFall!"

Addison Foster, Wally Newell's rival, claimed the lady at this moment, and McFall watched her follow him to the dance floor, clinging to his arm and cuddling appealingly, just as she had clung to his own arm a moment before.

"Funny—mighty funny!" he murmured, strangely stirred. "Seems like I could remember her to a T, under a lot of lights like that. Something to do with Australia! Funny!"

During the evening Horatius kept his eye

on the widow, and frowned and wrinkled up his smooth, guileless countenance as he tried to remember their former meeting. "I seen her somewheres," he repeated often. "Somewheres, all dressed up just like that, with bright lights and music playing. I'll take my oath to that."

"What say?" Bruce Ray asked. Bruce had spent most of the evening near Horatius, his blue eyes on his friend and in them the trustful, confiding look that the suffering patient accords to the great specialist handling his case. "Did you dope out a scheme yet?" Bruce whispered hoarsely.

"Not yet, Bruce. But I will say that Wally picked out a elegant lady for his wooing."

"Ain't she?" Bruce glowed with honest pride in his friend's choice. "Look at her dance! Look how she carries herself! I'm tellin' you that's the kind of woman that deserves Wally Newell. And high time Wally was settlin' down, too, as I was—Hey, what the hell!"

Bruce Ray started from the wall, where he had been leaning, and shoved his way among the dancers, his huge fists doubling and his tow mustache bristling.

The music had stopped, and couples were forming for another fox trot. Wally had presented himself to Kitten McCoy, and simultaneously Wally's rival, Addison Foster, had come to claim the dance.

Bruce, the argus-eyed chaperon, saw all this, and acted with a suddenness more reminiscent of the logging camp than the ballroom. His big hand clamped onto Addison Foster's shoulder and spun him around. He growled ominously: "This here is Mr. Newell's turn to dance with that lady, if you get what I mean!"

"You promised me, ma'am!" Wally was protesting.

Addison Foster, helpless in the giant's grip, coughed out something about being only a gentleman, he could scarcely be expected to compete with loggers and their barroom methods.

The red-haired widow gave a little scream, a pretty little scream that proved she was more pleased and frightened. She cuddled up to Bruce Ray and gently detached his hand from Foster's shoulder.

"You great big rude man!" she declared. "You mustn't play rough, or you'll frighten poor little me 'most half to death!"

"My gosh, Mis' McCoy, I sure am sorry if I—"

"Now!" Kitten McCoy clapped her hands and beamed brightly on the contenders. "I have it. Just for the way you boys act I'm going to dance with this big bear and punish you both."

Horatius Algernon McFall observed all this closely. He studied over the significance of the scene during the dance, and afterward summoned Bruce and Wally from the hotel parlor by a significant beck of his head.

"Gents," he whispered when they were on the porch, "suppose we go some place where we ain't likely to be intruded upon. I think I got an idea that's going to iron the wrinkles out of the course of true love!"

IV.

THE three conspirators went down to the beach below the hotel, where, seated on logs, they went into solemn conclave. McFall, the expert on matrimony and women, delivered his opinion.

"The fair and frailer sex," said the ex-cook gravely, "falls into two general classifications, according to my way of thinking—ladies, and women. First there's the ladies, God bless 'em—ladies with tender hearts and natural feelings of modesty, ladies that needs a man's strong arm to protect 'em, and regards such protectors with an affection and reverence for their strength that makes a man's married life like it was heaven. On the other hand, there's just the women—women that wants the earth served up to 'em with a garnish of parsley on a silver platter, women that looks on a man as a good thing and an easy mark and a meal ticket, and nothing more. Gents, I've had both kinds, and I know. Now, this Mis' McCoy—"

"She's a lady!" Wally declared.

"Of course she's a lady," Bruce chimed in.

"Great grief! I don't say she ain't," Horatius hastened to agree. "That's the point, she's a true lady. She's one of these

little, tender-hearted, clinging type of women. She's the kind of lady looks up to a man as her natural protector and loves to regard him as such. Trouble is you ain't recognized that fact properly—"

"Look here, McFall—"

"What d'you mean? You mean I ain't treated that lady like she was a lady?" Wally began to seethe.

"I mean you ain't taking advantage of it. I mean you ain't using the right tactics," the cook cried hastily. "Love is a game, gents. The poet says 'All's fair in love and war.' The object of it is to win the lady, ain't it? Well, you don't play this campaign right, that's what's the matter! Now, take the case of this Mis' McCoy. She's a lady with a tender heart and a shrinking, clinging nature, like the vine that twines its tendrils round the sturdy oak, like the poet says. Ain't that so—"

"Horatius is right. By godfrey, that's a true word, Wally!"

"Of course I'm right. Now what a woman like that looks up to is strength in a man. She wants a hero. She'll worship a hero. Trouble with Wally is he don't show that he is a hero."

"Suffering sockeyes, Horatius, how'm I going to show her I'm a hero?"

"That's just it!" Horatius exclaimed. "That's the point! You're small in stature, Wally. It ain't your fault, of course! You was made that way. I know and Bruce knows that when you get into action they ain't anything living that moves faster or can put up a livelier fight. We both seen you work. But you ain't trying to marry me or Bruce, you're trying to marry this Mis' McCoy. *And she don't know!*"

Bruce burst out aggrievedly: "Well, she'd ought to know! What do you suppose I been talkin' to her about all this time? Talkin' until I can't raise my voice above a whisper, I'm so clean wore out with it! Ain't I told her? Ain't I told her how Wally cleaned up that gang that come over from the Troy traps lookin' for a fight with Old Man Morris's outfit? Ain't I told her how Wally, single-handed, licked a whole scow load of roughnecks that Blacky McDonald was tryin' to steal for Todd's camp? Ain't I told her how Wally beat up the

Terrible Swede that night in Billy the Mug's bar—"

"Aw, what d'you want to go tell her them things for?" Wally protested. "She'll think I'm a regular drunken shingle-weaver!"

"What d'you want to tell her anything for?" McFall cried.

"What d'you mean, not tell her? You said—"

"I say *show* her! Show her that Wally's the equal of twice his weight in bobcats. Show her Wally's a gent, and a real hero. Show her he's got a heart that beats for woman in distress, a wallop that 'd floor a pile-driver and a disposition that's so tender a little child can handle him and not get scratched. Show her, don't tell her!"

"Horatius McFall, you talk like a old he-fool! How in the name of the pearly gates of hell are we goin' to show the lady that?"

"Yes, how?" Wally chimed in.

"Simple!" McFall exclaimed triumphantly. "It's simple if you boys 'll learn to use your brains. Now you listen to me and I'll tell you a story I seen one time in a movie show."

"Story! What's that got to do with it? Don't start kiddin' us, Horatius."

"It was like this," the cook went on placidly. "They was a lady, like Mis' McCoy. A big brute like Bruce, here, was in love with her and kidnaped her into a cave in the woods. And then the hero—he was a kind of slender, handsome sort of party that didn't look like he dast insult a tomcat—he found the lady in the nitch of time, and the way he lit into the big fellow was something scandalous. After he'd beat up that brute so his own mother wouldn't recognize him again the lady seen she'd made a mistake despising him and that he had the right stuff in him, after all, and she wrapped her arms around his neck, and the picture ended with happiness to all. And, gents, the same look was in that lady's eye that was in the eye of Mis' McCoy when that little ruction started on the dance floor in there. Kind of scared, yet pleased! Kind of a proud look for the hero that rescued her, if you understand what I'm drivin' at. So that's how I got the idea, and if you take my advice that's the plan you'll

follow. Remember, I've led five to the alfar—"

"Plan! What plan?" Wally wanted to know.

"If that's a plan, I'm a Chinaman," Bruce Ray declared.

"Ain't I doing my best to tell you the plan? Lay off and let me talk! Or maybe you'd rather bungle along and let this Addison Foster win the lady's heart and hand?"

Wally and Bruce hurriedly assured Horatius that he had the floor. They paid him the compliment of close attention while he detailed his notion of translating the incident of the movie show into real life and genuine thrills. And in time Horatius Algernon McFall, who had married and mourned for five of his own, had them convinced that he understood women.

V.

As the details developed and rehearsals ironed out the rough spots, Horatius Algernon McFall was inclined to look on the little drama in real life, which he had cooked up and was stage managing as one of his culinary triumphs. The plot was simple.

Wally, of course, must be the hero. It was Wally who was to wrest the widow from the hands of the brute who had abducted her to his woodland lair.

The rôle of the brute was assigned to Bruce Ray after a great deal of argument.

"Hell, boys, I can't do it! I just couldn't touch a finger to that lady. I wouldn't dast!" Bruce objected.

"But, Bruce, somebody's got to do it. It's all pretending, anyhow—"

"Aw, no. Don't ask me! I'm a-scairt to do it, Wally."

"Nothing to be scairt of," Horatius argued. "Just grab her up and run off with her to the old cabin, that's all. Me, I'd do it myself, but I'm too fat! Nobody 'd ever take me for a wild man—not even a lady. Bruce, I thought you'd do anything to help out Wally?"

"My godfrey, so I would! But—but—"

On the grounds of friendship they won him over. He consented to be the wild man of the woods. For that reason he left Honest

John's hotel and retired to the abandoned logging camp to let his whiskers grow and be perfected in the arts of Thespis.

After two weeks Horatius was satisfied they could give a finished performance. Bruce had grown sufficient whiskers to pass as a wild and villainous caveman, Wally was desperate enough to undertake the rescue with proper spirit, and besides, the widow was showing a preference for the company of Addison Foster, the shoe salesman.

The plot was simple. Wally was to take Kitten McCoy for a walk in the woods and make an excuse to leave her alone. Bruce would kidnap her and carry her to a ruinous log cabin. There the dashing Wally would trail her, engage in a thrilling rough-and-tumble battle, in which he would completely vanquish the wild man. After that Horatius was willing to trust to Nature and feminine psychology.

"But, remember, gents," he said earnestly, "that fight has got to look like it was the real thing. Get mad! Don't forget. Go at it like it was life or death, but, Bruce, for the sake of Pete, don't you go forget and not let Wally floor you!"

"Aw, shucks, Horatius, it don't seem right fighting thataway in front of a lady!"

"You fight!" Horatius said firmly. "You fight if you aim to help out your old pal. And, another thing, don't you dast say a word when you carry off the lady. Silence will scare her most. Besides, if you was to speak, you'd go apologizing to her!"

Horatius was well satisfied. He had come to like the rôle of expert in feminine psychology, and the doglike gratitude of two such famous old-timers as Bruce and Wally was ample reward for his trouble. Only one thing troubled him.

"I do wish to Tophet I could remember where I seen that widow before," he mused. "I did see her, sure as sunrise. With that kind of a fancy dress, and bare arms—and a lot of bright lights shining. Australia! Funny I keep thinking of Australia."

VI.

THE abduction worked perfectly. Horatius, watching from the shelter of the undergrowth, was delighted.

Bruce Ray, who would lay down his life any time for his friend, was in a state of mind that made him terrible, indeed. Laying down his life was as nothing compared to what Wally asked of him now. An inbred terror of women in general, aggravated by a severe attack of stage fright, had driven him into a sort of desperation that made him truly wild. No actor could have looked half so dangerous.

When this tattered, terrifying apparition burst from the woods and snatched her into his arms the Widow McCoy gave one gasp and then lay still while Bruce trotted off with her.

"Likely fainted," Horatius thought. "That's all the better. Now, Wally—" He turned to Newell, crouching beside him. Wally had laid aside his new blue coat, neatly folded. He had loosed the collar from his shirt, torn the shirt open in the accepted manner of heroes who always expose manly bosoms, rumpled up his hair and already assumed a look of righteous indignation which was not altogether pretense. The sight of Kitten McCoy in Bruce's arms was a bit startling to Wally.

"After 'em, boy!" the cook whispered tensely. "But not too fast, Wally! Easy! Give Bruce time to reach the cabin!"

Wally was off like a shot, Horatius following in his wake. The cook was not built for running, and the underbrush was thick. After he had wallowed through a blackberry thicket and just saved himself from a bad fall by grasping at a stalk of prickly devil's club he took it at a walk. Puffing, sweating and still busy picking briars out of various parts of his anatomy, he finally neared the ruinous cabin and heard sounds of a commotion worthy of the best melodrama.

Feet were thudding on the old plank floor and groans and grunts and the occasional smack of a fist punctuated the thudding. Wally and Bruce were fighting hammer and tongs.

The cook circled the front of the building and stole up from the rear. Half the roof of the place had fallen in and the walls gaped. It was no trouble to find a peephole.

The fighters circled dizzily, fainting, rushing, dodging. Most of Wally's shirt had

been torn off. There was a trickle of real blood smeared across the pseudo wild man's face. His blue eyes gleamed terribly from under the thatch of blond hair.

The Widow McCoy stood flattened against the log wall, half crouching, all her attention concentrated on the two combatants.

Her brown eyes were gleaming, wide with a fierce sort of exultation. Her red lips parted in what might have been a grimace of terror, but looked more like a smile of delight. She clasped her hands, and from time to time gasped words of encouragement, unintelligible to the cook.

The drumming boots of the fighters raised a terrific cloud of dust from the rotting boards. The very frame of the old cabin rocked and rattled with the battle.

"Get him, Wally! Land on him!" Horatius prompted through his chink in the wall. "Soak him, old kid! Atta boy! Bruce! Bruce! Lay down! Lay down, you fat head! 'S' enough, I tell you. O-o-o-oh!"

Wally had rushed the big man. Their arms locked about each other's waists.

The hero looked like a child of ten in Bruce Ray's grip.

They teetered and shuffled, wrestling savagely.

Then Wally ripped himself free, and his right fist flashed, smack! Bruce tottered. Smack! came the hero's left. The huge logger dropped with a crash like the fall of a giant redwood. The solid earth quivered with shock.

Then a moment of stupefying silence.

Wally, the hero, rocked a little dizzily as he leaned over the prostrate caveman, fists ready to inflict further punishment if the brute as much as dared stir.

But Bruce was satisfied. He had laid his wreath on friendship's altar. He had nothing more to contribute.

Wally turned on the widow. "Fear nothing, dear lady," he panted, stumbling over the speech Horatius had taught him, "this big stiff won't—er—won't—that is—"

The diminutive hero never remembered the rest of what he had to say. It was some time before he remembered anything clearly.

Kitten McCoy bounded from her corner.

She said nothing at all, but the smile on her face was grim and terrible, and as she came her right fist lashed out like a tongue of avenging flame. The blow spun Wally Newell like a top.

Before he ceased spinning the widow caught him again.

Wally emitted one yell, one wild, mad yell, compounded of equal parts of pain, surprise and indignation. Vainly he tried to cover himself from her blows. She drove him round and round the little cabin, and fast as he went her blows landed faster.

A crouching, grinning terror was the Widow McCoy, a terror with two fists of granite and the skill and muscle to drive them accurately and fast as bullets. She moved with a lithe, bounding grace that was feline, and every move urged the hapless Wally to greater terror.

Bruce Ray, sitting up, witnessed the astounding exhibition with his jaw hanging open. Wally was getting the worst of it! When that fact finally registered the big man leaped to his feet and shoved himself between the pursuer and pursued, bellowing: "Lay off him, ma'am. For Pete's sake, lay off—"

The widow seemed scarcely to notice his presence. She leaped around him to land another blow.

"Hey!" Bruce roared in protest. "Hey, you!"

This time he caught her arm in his huge hand and stopped her.

The arm was snatched from his grasp. "Keep out of this," snapped the Widow McCoy, and before the big man could raise a finger her fist connected neatly with the point of his chin. Bruce Ray toppled and fell again, and this time his fall was less artistic, but much more convincing. He had been knocked out in dead earnest.

A moment more the battling widow toyed with her prey. Then Wally Newell followed his friend to the floor.

Kitten McCoy turned then on the fallen giant. She flung herself to the floor beside Bruce, and with her little lace handkerchief began to wipe the blood from his face.

"Bruce!" she sobbed. "Bruce, deary! Open your eyes! Say you forgive me!"

Bruce, I didn't mean to hurt my big boy! I didn't mean to. Deary, speak to me—oh, speak to me—”

VII.

WALLY NEWELL had crawled from the cabin and Horatius assisted him to a near-by stream, where he bathed himself and gradually recovered some recollection of events. With the cook's recital to fill the gaps the state of affairs dawned on Wally.

“Oh, my gosh, Horatius! She never wanted to be rescued! That must have been it—and yet it don't seem possible. It don't seem as if it could be—Horatius, sneak back and see what they're doing now!”

Horatius did and reported.

“I guess you're right, Wally. She didn't want to be took away from Bruce. She's a-tying up his scratches and calling him her Little Lambseytivey. Looks to me like she'd made up her mind to marry Bruce—”

“But, Horatius, supposing Bruce don't want to marry her?”

“Wally,” said the cook with dread significance, “I guess if *she's* made up her

mind, that's settled. Would you go for to refuse a lady with a wallop like that?”

Wally groaned and shuddered.

“And what's more,” Horatius said, “I remember at last where I seen her before. It came to me while she was chasing you round the cabin. Must have been fifteen years ago, but I'll never forget it. They was a circus to Whatcom one Fourth of July, Wally, and it had a genuine Australian boxing kangaroo. Used to put gloves on all fours of that kangaroo's feet and invite all comers to scrap him. When he got mad he'd raise up on his tail and land a punch with his hind foot that knocked out the best rough-and-tumble fighters on Puget Sound. Then a lady come out in the ring and put on the gloves with that kangaroo. And, Wally, that lady walloped the tar out of him!”

“I remember it all now, like it was yesterday, the bright lights, and the lady's spangly dress and her curly red hair. It's her, all right, Wally, her back there in the cabin, making up her mind to marry Bruce! That's the lady in the circus that used to lick the kangaroo!”



THE MODERN PROPOSAL

WHY worry over rumpled lace
When you've a lover to embrace?
Yet—is the rouge upon your face
A blunder?

Will he disturb your hair's smooth gold—
Isn't the evening growing cold?—
Cruel to break a lover's hold
Asunder!

No one will watch you but the moon;
You must go back soon—all too soon—
But now the near lips softly croon
For plunder;

Well, when you go indoors and blink,
Disheveled just a bit, I think,
Will you be brazen? Will you shrink?
I wonder!

Ruth Wright Kauffman.



A New Girl in Town

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "A Self-Made Thief," "Country Love," "Madame Storey's Way," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FAIRY TALE.

THE big davenport in front of the fireplace accommodated the whole quartet in a row: Sutcliffe, Diantha, Myra, and Dimmock. Before leaving Kittson had replenished the fire with cannel coal, and all four pairs of eyes were held fascinated by the leaping yellow flames. To have seen them sitting there so quietly relaxed, who could have suspected the feelings and passions stirring within; lust, a cold hate and a generous indignation. Sutcliffe glanced sideways at Diantha's lovely neck and his limbs twitched; Myra, while she plotted the girl's betrayal, caught up her hand and affectionately patted it. Diantha, suspecting what was passing in her thoughts, could scarcely tolerate her touch. Only Dimmock had nothing in particular on his mind. He supplied most of the chatter.

"This is great! An open fire lets you down so comfy. Life in this town keeps you keyed up to concert pitch. You have to watch out or you bust your G string."

"You're keyed up too sharp, Dimmock," drawled Myra. "You squeak!"

"Lovely lady, I am no Stradivarius, but only a Montgomery Ward. But if you will deign to play on me—"

"Oh, shut up! What makes you so quiet, Diantha?"

"Nothing. It's nice here."

"Better than that foolish play?"

"Rather! Kirwan is the quiet one."

"What, ho, Sut!" cried Dimmock.

"Avast, there!" answered Sutcliffe.

"He looks pale," opined Dimmock.

"Must have been the curry with chopped almonds and raisins. That was masterly, Myra! Must get the recipe from you. Once when I lunched with the Bleecker Van Brocklins they had a curry—"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 23.

Dimmock's great preoccupation was food, and he was well launched now. The other three let him run on while they thought their own thoughts. The proper way to cook a canvas back; submerge him in boiling fat for twenty minutes to seal up his delectable juices; the various merits of béchamel, hollandaise and béarnaise, *et cetera*, *et cetera*.

Once when Diantha leaned forward to poke the fire Myra sent Sutcliffe an admonishing glance behind her back. He was giving too much away in his looks at Diantha. He was not playing up to the sprightly part Myra had laid down for him.

Sutcliffe roused himself with an effort and started to chaff Dimmock. Dimmock came back. The verbal shuttlecock was batted back and forth. It was not very witty, but Diantha laughed good naturedly. Nothing could have seemed more innocent and harmless.

When a lull came Myra said lazily: "Kirwan, haven't you a lot of cups that you won in track meets at college?"

"On the sideboard in the dining room," said Sutcliffe.

"I want to see them. Come on, Dimmock."

The two strolled into the next room. Sutcliffe's eyes were fixed on them. A long breath escaped him. He leaned toward Diantha.

"Thank God!" he murmured. "I couldn't have stood it much longer! What a torment to sit here beside you with others present! To have to make small talk!"

The passion in his voice scorched Diantha. She shrank away from him. "Kirwan, please," she murmured. "They'll be back in a moment!"

He put a strong curb on himself, and took her hand quietly.

"I worship you," he murmured. "You do care a little, don't you?"

"I—I think so," stammered Diantha. "Listen."

From the next room came Myra's lazy drawl, praising the cups. Then the sound ceased. Diantha, after waiting a moment, called:

"Myra!"

"From the next room: 'Yes, dear?'"

"Aren't you coming back?"

"There's another adorable settee in here. We're trying it out."

Sutcliffe's arm was creeping around Diantha's waist, and his lips were at her ear.

"You see, darling, they want to give us a teeny little chance to be together!"

Diantha shied away from him. Sutcliffe bit his lip in chagrin. Indeed, Diantha seemed to be of two minds whether to stay or join Myra. He exerted his powers of cajolery.

"Forgive me, Di! Suppose I startled you. It was rotten of me when you're here in my place. You are more than ever sacred to me here. I've got a grip on myself now. You needn't be afraid."

How astonished would he have been could he have read the apparently shrinking girl's thoughts.

"If Myra is going to sneak out, I wish she'd be done with it, so I could get the letters and make my own get-away. I suppose he has a pistol somewhere. But it can't be on him. I can get mine out first. How can I keep him covered, and at the same time get the safe open? Well, if the worst comes to the worst I'll have to open the window."

"You are so wonderful!" he went on. "And so terribly sweet! Your hair is like a bronze mist—how lovely it must be when it's down! Your neck is like cream!"

"Don't praise me, Kirwan," she murmured in seeming confusion. She had a difficult part to play.

A light laugh came to them from the next room.

"What's the joke?" Diantha called out. Sutcliffe turned away impatiently.

Myra's answer came: "Not worth repeating, dear. Dimmock's got as far as the roast in his bill of fare. He says geese should be stuffed with chestnuts. I told him he was, and now he's sore."

They laughed.

"It's because I am kept from you that I get so savage," Sutcliffe murmured. "If we were together you would find me very different. You are so many kinds of women I could love you hundreds of ways!"

"Kirwan, why can't we be quietly happy here by the fire?"

"We can—if you will come close to me."

She moved over a little.

"What do you see in the fire, sweetheart?" he asked.

"Nothing!" she said. "What do you see?"

"Look!" he said. "That big black lump at one side, that's a church, the portico of a church. That crack in it is the door not quite closed, and those little darting flames that come out, that's happiness. The church is so plumb full of happiness it's bursting out of the door! If you listen you can hear the most heavenly music coming out of that church. And outside you see there are crowds of little dancing flames. Those are the happy people waiting to wish them luck."

"Wish who luck?" whispered Diantha.

"Why, the boy and girl who are getting married in the church, of course. You'll see them in a minute. That smaller lump across from the church door, that's a big limousine waiting to transport them to the realms of bliss, their honeymoon car! Now the flames are burning brighter, the church door bursts open, here they come arm in arm with their dreamy eyes fixed on each other. He's a big fellow, you see, with a wild nature, but she can tame him with the lightest touch of her little hand. He adores her—"

In the next room Myra and Dimmock were frankly at a loss for conversation.

"Have we got to sit here all night?" Dimmock asked, yawning.

Myra shook her head.

"Can I get a drink from the sideboard?"

"No, the slightest sound now would spoil everything."

Her head was inclined to listen. At first she could hear the murmur of Sutcliffe's voice, but as his tale became more intimate it dropped. Stillness filled both rooms. Myra rose and glided to the opening. Concealed behind the door frame she strained her ears to hear. Sutcliffe was fully launched on his fairy story. A smile of gratified malice broke over Myra's face. Everything going fine!

Returning, she beckoned to Dimmock, and the two of them walking on tiptoe, passed out into the hall of the apartment.

Their wraps were lying on an oaken chest out there. Myra signed to Dimmock to gather them up. She opened the door with infinite caution, and peremptorily indicated the way out to him. His foolish face was drawn up in protest, but he obeyed.

Myra, following, closed the door so carefully that only the final click of the latch was heard. This was the prearranged signal back to Sutcliffe. Even if Diantha heard it, they figured she would think nothing of the closing of a door. She would not know but that Sutcliffe's servant was still in the flat.

Outside Myra laughed softly, and rang for the elevator.

Dimmock pursed his lips out. "I say, Myra, this is a rotten deal—"

"Be quiet!" she said. She languidly put up her arms to receive her cloak.

Dimmock put it about her and wriggled into his overcoat.

"Good God, what a devil you are!" he muttered.

Myra was flattered.

When Sutcliffe heard the door click a warm feeling of satisfaction stole through him. The business was about clinched now! He kept on with his story. He took an added zest in it, throwing a melting tenderness into his voice. He meant to have Diantha, anyway, but of course he preferred to charm her into yielding, if he could.

". . . And so the big boy and the little girl were happy ever afterward!"

Diantha had heard the click of a door, but could not be sure that it signified Myra's departure. Inside she felt as taut as steel. Nevertheless, her cheek was couched in the hollow of Sutcliffe's shoulder. He drew her closer to him.

Diantha snatched at any excuse to gain time. "Oh, Kirwan, our fire is dying down!"

"That's easy fixed," he said with a laugh. Leaning forward, he tapped the lumps with the poker. They fell apart, and the yellow flames leaped up afresh. "Plenty more happiness you see!"

"But that will only last a moment. And the scuttle is empty."

"More in the kitchen." He rose. He

had his own reason for wishing to leave the room. "Will you stay here until I come back?"

She nodded.

While he was getting the coal, he put the front door on its chain to guard against eventualities—such as a sudden break for freedom.

In his absence Diantha peeped into the next room. It was empty. So much the better! She looked desirously at the mahogany cabinet, but heard him coming back and made haste to resume her former attitude on the davenport.

When he returned to her side she declined to come back within his arm. "I'm not sure if I care—the right way," she murmured.

Like all sensualists Sutcliffe relied on sensuality. "There's only one way you can be sure," he said, leaning toward her with a confident smile.

"No, Kirwan!"

"Kiss me!"

"No, no!"

"You *must*!"

Diantha thought: "The moment has come!" She steeled herself.

"No!" she cried in quite a different tone. No maidenly indecision in this.

At this sharp reply Sutcliffe's countenance took an ugly turn. "What's the matter, don't you like me?"

"No!"

He laughed hatefully. Diantha moved away from him warily. He crept toward her, breathing fast, his lips parted and set in a sneer, his eyes filmy and irresponsible, purely animal. Diantha gained her feet and began to fumble for her pocket. She got a grip on the handle of her pistol. Before she could draw it the door bell sounded thrice.

Sutcliffe swallowed an oath. He had completely forgotten the expected waiter. Now he was afraid Diantha would seize the occasion of the man's entrance to escape. With a lightning change of front he began to laugh.

"I was just fooling!" he said.

Diantha was looking at him blankly. She couldn't imagine what this interruption portended. She didn't want to escape—yet.

"Wait here till I come back," said Sutcliffe.

She nodded.

Sutcliffe went down the hall telling himself that she was only putting up a bluff of resistance.

While he was out of the room Diantha gazed longingly at the safe again. But it was too risky to try to get it open before he returned. She must still play her part for a little.

She went through the rooms softly calling: "Myra! Myra!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WAITER.

AS soon as Kittson had carried out Sutcliffe's orders he made haste to change his clothes, threw his slender belongings into a grip, and left the apartment. He did not expect to return.

He hurried to a cigar store on Sixth Avenue and called up Randal Guyon's house. Randal was not at home. After the loss of several precious minutes Kittson ran him down in the athletic club, not a dozen blocks from where he was telephoning. Two minutes later a taxicab deposited Randal in front of the cigar store.

Kittson left his bag with the tobacconist and the two went outside to talk. Kittson, dreading the effect on Randal, told him haltingly what had happened.

But Randal took it as such blows are generally taken, quietly. He drew a sharp breath, his teeth came together with a snap, his body stiffened.

Kittson was becoming frightened by the quiet demeanor of the young man.

"What are you going to do, sir?" he stammered.

"Let me think," muttered Randal. "Whatever I do—I must do alone."

"I am here," said Kittson.

"Come on, let's walk in that direction," said Randal sharply. "I'll get in there somehow. You have a latch key?"

Kittson produced it. "But there's a chain on the door, sir. He's sure to fasten that."

"You said there was a waiter expected.

He's to ring three times. I'll ring three times."

"He's apt to take a look, sir, before he takes the chain off."

Randal considered. "I'll have to hide behind the stair door until the waiter comes. When Sutcliffe opens the door to him I'll rush it."

"But he's a bigger man than you, sir. How will you—"

Randal laughed a single note. "Don't worry about that. Once I get inside I'll handle him."

"Can't I help you, sir?"

Randal shook his head.

"I can't have any public row!"

When they were within a few yards of the apartment house a woman clad in magnificent sables came out, followed by an insignificant male. Randal and Kittson stopped.

"Myra Follett!" muttered the former. "You were right. They have left her there. Oh, God, if they've drugged her—"

"In that case he'd hardly order supper," suggested Kittson.

Randal pressed his arm gratefully. "You're right! But how could she consent to be left behind?"

Myra and Dimmock entered the waiting landaulet and drove away. Randal and Kittson parted. Randal entered the house. Kittson walked*up and down outside.

Randal was a frequent visitor in the apartment house. "Mr. Oddie in?" he asked carelessly.

"Yes, sir."

When the car let him out at the fourth floor Randal turned in the direction of Oddie's door. As soon as the boy had dropped out of sight, he softly retraced his steps to Sutcliffe's door and listened. He could hear nothing. With the greatest care he inserted the latch key Kittson had given him and turned it. The door opened for a couple of inches, but as he expected, it was caught on its chain.

Straining his ears Randal heard the low murmur of two voices from the living room. He could not hear the words. But there was nothing to excite alarm. His strained breast relaxed a little.

"I am in time," he thought.

But it was sufficiently maddening to be so near her, yet prevented from reaching her side by that chain.

The clang of the elevator door below forced him hastily to close Sutcliffe's door, and seek a hiding place on the stairs. The stairs were shut off the landing by a swing door alongside the elevator; this door had a little square pane of glass at eye-level. The elevator ascended to the floor above, discharged passengers and returned. Once more Randal opened Sutcliffe's door and listened.

Presently the elevator started to rise again, and he was forced to retreat behind the stair door. The car stopped beside him. Peering sidewise through the little pane he saw the waiter get out, carrying his tray. It was a man from Clarétie's, who had often served Randal. His name was Antoine. Antoine paused by the elevator door to chat with the operator. That youth stuck his head out of the car, and both of them looking at Sutcliffe's door, nodded and leered significantly.

It caused the watcher's breast to burn. That such men should make light of Diantha was almost more than he could bear. It suggested a new difficulty. How could he allow the waiter to be a witness to Diantha's humiliation? Out of his distress a new plan of action was suddenly born. The waiter should not see Diantha.

The elevator door clanged, and the waiter started across the landing. Randal pushed out of his door, and laid a hand on the astonished Antoine's arm just as it was extended to press Sutcliffe's bell.

Antoine, seeing who it was, bobbed his head and smiled. Mr. Guyon was a good customer. Randal, affecting a jocular air which sat queerly on his drawn white face, laid a finger on his lips for silence, and drew Antoine back from Sutcliffe's door.

"I'm going to play a joke on Mr. Sutcliffe," he said. "Lend me your hat and coat and apron."

At first Antoine looked dubious. Apparently he doubted the good taste of the joke when Mr. Sutcliffe was entertaining a lady. But then, for all he knew, it was still Mr. Guyon's apartment, too, and, anyhow, who was he to question the doings of the young

Olympians? He was assisted in arriving at a decision by the appearance of Guyon's pocketbook and the flash of a five-dollar bill.

Making believe to enter into the spirit of the joke with many nods and grins, Antoine put his tray down on the floor, and the exchange of clothing was effected. Antoine tied the apron around Guyon's waist, and helped him into the bob-tailed coat. Guyon pulled the battered felt hat down over his eyes, and thrust his clothes upon Antoine.

He urged the waiter toward the stairway.

"Make your way out by the service entrance so the boys won't see you."

Antoine seemed to fear that Mr. Sutcliffe might make trouble for him.

"No chance! No chance!" said Guyon. "If you should lose your job call me up and I'll get you another."

Antoine finally went down the stairs. Guyon picked up the tray and waited until he could no longer hear the sound of his footsteps. Then he rang Sutcliffe's bell. He rang three times.

Sutcliffe opened the door on the chain. Guyon kept his head down as if he were concerned with steadying the tray. The briefest of glances satisfied Sutcliffe that it was the waiter he expected, and closing the door to throw off the chain, he opened it wide. He had no intention of letting the waiter inside, though. Putting out his hands for the tray, he said:

"I'll take it. You needn't wait."

As Sutcliffe took the tray out of his hands Randal contrived to give the door a little push with his foot so that it swung all the way back. Then he sidled in over the threshold.

"Get out!" said the astonished Sutcliffe.

Randal murmured in a disguised voice something about his "check."

"They know me at Clarétie's!" said Sutcliffe indignantly.

He was encumbered with the tray. Before he could put the waiter out he had to turn and set it down on the oaken chest. That gave Randal his opening. He darted into the dining room, throwing down the absurd hat as he ran and calling softly:

"Diantha! Diantha!"

Diantha was standing in the opening between the two rooms.

"You!" she gasped.

A conflict of feelings: terror, shame, anger overwhelmed her. That man! The son of the woman she was trying to save! For the moment she lost her grip. She covered her face.

Sutcliffe, having prudently lingered to close the hall door, rushed into the room beside himself with anger. "Get out of here, you damned snooper!" he cried.

"Not without her, Sutcliffe!" said Randal, firmly.

Diantha had recovered herself. There was but the one line possible for her to take, though it killed her.

"Go!" she said. "How dare you come spying on me!"

Sutcliffe laughed. "There's your answer. Get out!"

It was like a blow in the face to Guyon, but he loved her well enough not to be moved by it.

To Diantha he said: "You were tricked into coming here. Don't you see it now? It was a plot!"

Diantha could have wrung her hands at the ghastly wrong of the situation. She remained silent, averting her face from Randal.

"Damn you! Have I got to thrash you again?" cried Sutcliffe.

"Yes," said Randal with a hard smile. "That's what I came for."

At that point the situation passed entirely out of Diantha's control. She could only look on. Wriggling out of the waiter's coat, Randal flung it on the floor, that most primitive of male gestures. Sutcliffe followed suit. A faint cry escaped from Diantha, and she covered her face again. Sutcliffe, angry as a bull, charged Randal. Randal nimbly side-stepped him, and escaped around the table. He was as cool as the other man was furious.

As Sutcliffe came after him he held up his hand with an authoritative gesture. Sutcliffe stopped, disconcerted. Randal, keeping the tail of an eye on the other man, put his weight against the heavy table and rolled it into the corner. Suddenly becoming conscious of the absurdity of the waiter's apron,

Randal pulled the string that confined it, and tossed that aside, too.

Sutcliffe rushed him again. This time Randal was not quick enough. He received a blow on the side of the head as from a sledge hammer and crashed to the floor.

In that moment Diantha acknowledged her heart. She ran toward the window. But Randal was not knocked out by a good bit.

"Keep away!" he cried. "We want no outsiders in this. I can handle him."

Diantha fell back. Sutcliffe laughed, his confidence thoroughly restored.

"Get up, if you want more," he said.

He was crouching over Randal, prepared to smash him the instant he started to rise. Randal, seeing that he would not fight fair, caught hold of one of his ankles, and in the act of rising, butted his shoulder into Sutcliffe's chest. The intended blow spent itself on the air, and Sutcliffe measured his back on the rug.

He sprang up angrier than ever. Randal was waiting for him on tiptoe across the room. That first blow had made him wary. Sutcliffe was still the heavier man, and all the training in the world could not equalize that. But Randal was hard and Sutcliffe was soft. Randal's line clearly was to tire the other man out. He allowed Sutcliffe to chase him around the room. When he was cornered he ducked.

Sutcliffe jeered, and Diantha thought her defender was beaten. She stole toward the window again.

"Randal, I must!" she murmured.

"Come away," he cried in a voice that astonished her. How the sound of his name on her lips had heartened him!

Sutcliffe's face was purple.

"Stand still, you damned coward!" he cried thickly.

Randal laughed. "Patience! Patience! You'll get yours directly!"

Sutcliffe caught him by the table, and Randal's head rang again. To save himself he clinched. They stamped and swayed all over the room. Having clinched, Randal could not tear himself loose. Sutcliffe got an arm about his neck and was bent on strangling him. Randal got his knee up between them, and thrusting out, broke the

other man's hold and sent him reeling back. Sutcliffe, choking with rage, tore his collar open. It was not a pretty fight.

"Look out you don't burst a blood vessel, steak face!" taunted Randal. "You eat too much for a scrapper."

Sutcliffe rushed him. Randal jerked his head aside and sent in his own right with every ounce of strength he possessed behind it. Sutcliffe dropped. A little cry of encouragement escaped Diantha. She was watching now with a fiery concentration that had burned up all other feelings. When Sutcliffe perceived that warlike look in her eye he was afraid to turn his back on her.

Randal stood away while Sutcliffe scrambled to his feet. Sutcliffe staggered to the sideboard, and before they realized what he was after, snatched up a cut glass liquor bottle and hurled it at Randal's head. It went wide. It smashed against the wall beyond, and the contents splashed and ran down the embossed wall covering.

Sutcliffe caught up the remaining bottle of the pair, and kept it for a weapon. Hoarsely panting for breath he threatened Randal with it.

Randal made a feint of attacking. Sutcliffe brought the bottle down harmlessly. As he raised his hand again Randal struck his wrist and the bottle flew out of his hand. Randal rushed in. Sutcliffe made for the door, Randal at his heels. As he ran Sutcliffe swung a chair behind him, and Randal crashed over it. Sutcliffe, turning, kicked him viciously.

Diantha was electrified. She rushed at Sutcliffe like a flame, struggling to get her pistol out. The man fell back, dismayed. A second was all that Randal required to gain his feet.

Thrusting Diantha out of the way he sailed into Sutcliffe with right and left. The latter was getting groggy. He spent himself in wild swings. His defense was wide open. Summoning all his strength, Randal sent his right to the jaw. Sutcliffe dropped and lay inert.

Randal looked down at him a little stupidly. In the moment of his long-worked-for triumph he felt no triumph. He felt nothing. He had accomplished his aim, and for the moment he felt as if he had lost

something. The driving force was suddenly removed.

He was recalled to himself by a sound from Diantha behind him. She was weeping softly, hurriedly, weakly, the little sobs stumbling over each other. Still he was curiously unmoved.

"Don't!" he said. "It's all right now."

Diantha wiped away the tears. They looked for a long time at each other and all sorts of thoughts came creeping between them—thoughts they could not face. They looked away from each other.

"Let's go," said Randal at last.

"Wait!" murmured Diantha. "There's something I must get. Watch him!"

She ran into the next room. Snatching open the drawer of the desk, she got the little key and opened the mahogany cabinet. She dropped on her knees before the safe. For a ghastly moment the figures deserted her, but she closed her eyes and they came back as if written in fire inside her eyelids.

Start at ten; two turns to the left and stop at thirty; three turns to the right and stop at seventy; one-half turn back to twenty. Her hands trembled so that she made several misses. Finally the handle yielded under her hand, and the little door swung heavily open.

A slight sound from the opening between the two rooms caused her to look up. Randal was standing there watching her in amazement. The jealous curiosity of a lover had been too strong for him. Diantha thrust the packet of letters inside her bodice. But he could see what it was. His face became distorted with suspicion, jealousy, rage.

"What are you doing?" he demanded harshly.

Diantha got to her feet. "Those are letters that Sutcliffe stole," she said quickly.

Randal came further into the room.

"Whose letters?"

Diantha was silent. "What am I to do?" she thought despairingly. Sutcliffe appeared in the opening behind Randal. He was staggering with weakness, his face ghastly; he had to lean against the door frame to support himself. Astonishment and rage contorted his pale features at the sight of the letters in Diantha's hand. Then, with

a glance at Randal, came malicious pleasure. He chuckled hatefully.

"Whose letters?" repeated Randal.

Diantha turned sick at heart. But it was not of herself she was thinking. Sutcliffe would now, she supposed, seeing that the game was up, tell Randal out of pure devilishness. However, Sutcliffe remained silent, enjoying the scene.

"Your letters?" cried Randal.

"Oh, no, no, no!" exclaimed Diantha involuntarily.

"Then show them to me!" cried Randal in a voice that grated with pain. "I believe in you! I want to believe in you! Good God, don't let him stand there laughing!"

"I have no right," murmured Diantha from between stiff lips. "They are not mine."

Sutcliffe laughed outright.

"That sounds like a lying excuse!" cried Randal, beside himself. "This is no time to stand on a point of honor! Anyhow, if they don't concern me, you know that I can keep my mouth shut."

"I will not show them to you," said Diantha.

"Then they are your letters!"

"They are not mine!"

"You have my permission to show them to him," jeered Sutcliffe.

"Will you take me away from this place?" pleaded Diantha.

"No!" cried Randal. "Not till you show me those letters!"

"Then I must go by myself."

She moved toward the hall door. Randal, with a rush, gained it before her.

"You shall not go until you have shown me!" he cried.

Diantha was no tame woman. Her breast burned with indignation at the injustice of his suspicion. She was sorely tempted to show him the letters. How it would crush him! How sweet it would be to bring him to her feet begging for forgiveness. But a thought of the colonel restrained her. It would not be according to the colonel's idea of playing the game.

"Let me pass!" she said. "What right have you—"

"Right!" he cried wildly. "I believed

in you through thick and thin! I loved you. I fought for you. I knocked him out. Oh, God, only to have him give me the laugh! And you ask me what right! I don't care whether I have any right or not. I'll make a right!"

She thought she could subdue him. She started firmly for the door, one hand on her breast where the letters were. But she saw that he was quite mad with rage and pain. He meant to seize her.

"Would you dare to touch me?" she said, faltering.

"You try to get out and you'll see!"

"You're no better than he is!"

"I don't care! Show me those letters!"

The situation was hopeless. She could do no more. As Randal came toward her with his head down, Sutcliffe, enjoying the scene from the other doorway, Diantha turned and fled back across the room to a side window. She flung up the sash.

Randal reached her with a bound. He thought she meant to throw herself out, perhaps. He dragged her away from the window, and pulled down the sash again. But Diantha knew her signal would not be missed.

For the moment all the rage was frightened out of Randal. He was imploring now. He followed her about the room, pleading.

"Diantha, show me those letters! Good God, don't you see how you are torturing me? What if they are your letters? I can make allowances for ignorance—or even folly. I could forgive you anything—or almost anything, if only you do not try to hide things from me!"

"You have nothing to forgive!" she said indignantly. "I told you the letters were not mine."

"How can I believe that if you won't show them to me, with him laughing there? I'm sorry for the ugly things I said. I'm begging you now! Diantha, put me out of my misery one way or the other!"

This was harder for her to bear than his rage. "You are only tormenting yourself," she said painfully. "You have no reason."

But he continued to follow her about and to plead.

In the middle of it the bell rang, followed by an imperative knock on the door.

"That's Colonel Flowerday," said Diantha. "Better open the door or he'll break it in."

Randal's face turned ugly with suspicion again. He ran down the hall, and opened the door. Diantha followed him part way. Sutcliffe made his way to the door from the dining room into the hall. His expression suggested that he knew his jig was up, anyway, and intended to get what fun he could out of watching his enemies destroy themselves.

Outside the door Colonel Flowerday was revealed, a couple of determined-looking men behind him, and several inquisitive hallboys looking over their shoulders.

"Let them all stay outside," said Diantha.

At the sight of her protector, her strength began to fail her. She could do no more than waver to his supporting arm.

The door was closed.

At the sight of Randal the colonel had paled. "Good God! What is he doing here?" he murmured.

Diantha whispered to him: "He doesn't know."

Randal saw that whisper. "Ha, here's the other one!" he cried, quite mad with jealousy. "The old blackguard! Tell me, will you, what you are to these two men and I'll go?"

"Tell him," whispered Diantha to the colonel.

"As to Sutcliffe," said the colonel gravely, "she came here to get some letters that he stole, and that he has been using to blackmail a lady. As to me"—he hesitated a moment—"I am her father."

There was a silence, broken only by the sound of Diantha's suppressed sobs. Sutcliffe was staring at the colonel in stupefaction.

Suddenly Randal laughed wildly, peal after peal.

"Oh! Expect me to believe that? That's a bit too thick!" So extreme was his anguish he could even turn to Sutcliffe, the man he had just thrashed. "Hear that, Sut? Rich, eh? You called me a soft-headed fool once. By God, you were right!"

Colonel Flowerday caught up Diantha's

cloak from the chest where it lay. Opening the door, he drew her out, and closed it behind them.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

AT eleven o'clock next morning Colonel Flowerday had himself carried to the Renaissance *château* that had housed the last two generations of the Guyon family in New York. Once more he was ushered into the intimate reception room, furnished in the delicate old world fashion created a century and a half ago, brought back during the last generation, and now becoming a little old-fashioned again.

To him there, after the briefest space of time, came the slender, graceful mistress of the house almost running. In all the years he had known her, the colonel had never seen Nancy Guyon so nearly lose her composure. Her face was as white as paper, her eyes wild with suspense.

"Crispin!" she gasped. "You said you would not come here again until—until—"

Her breath failed her. She involuntarily clasped her hands.

From his pocket the colonel had taken a packet of faded blue envelopes confined by an elastic band. He silently handed it over.

She caught it to her breast without a sound, and dropped into a chair. Her face became even more bloodless; her head dropped back. He thought she was about to faint, and looked around for a bell to summon help.

"No, no!" she whispered. "Don't bring anybody. It's only the relief!"

Tears forced themselves from under her closed eyelids, and she began to sob quietly. He saw that the crisis had passed. It seemed to him that the kindest thing was to wait in silence until she had regained her control.

Finally she began to speak in a low voice checked by sobs. "Crispin—nobody knows what I have suffered. For five years I have not known a really happy moment, nor a quiet night of sleep—I cannot believe all at once that the nightmare is over—"

He was standing beside her chair, bending down to catch her broken words. Suddenly she caught up his hand and pressed it to her lips.

He snatched it away, a little scandalized. "Oh, Nancy, you mustn't! Not to me! It shames me! Anyway, I have done nothing. It wasn't I who got them back for you."

"It was she?" she murmured.

"Yes, it was my girl."

"How can I ever repay her?"

The colonel was silent; a little grim.

Mrs. Guyon was quickly herself again. A delicate color returned to her cheeks. She counted the letters. Each was still contained in its opened envelope.

"Ten! Yes, they're all here!" She regarded them with an extraordinary sadness. "Poor, innocent little letters to have caused so much unhappiness! Written out of the purest feelings of my heart!"

She took off the rubber band, and taking the top letter in her hands, let the others fall in her lap. She started to tear the letter across, but the tough paper resisted her. Something caused her to look up in the colonel's face. It was drawn and harassed; not at all the face of a man who had just successfully accomplished a difficult task. His expression caused her to ask involuntarily:

"Don't you think they ought to be destroyed?"

"I suppose so," he said.

"Crispin, has anything serious happened?"

"That's all in the point of view."

"Tell me."

He drew a chair close to hers, and sitting, began to speak rapidly.

She only interrupted him once. "Randal there!" she cried. "How did that happen?"

"He's in love with my girl," muttered the colonel, pulling his mustache.

"Yes, I know," murmured Nancy very low. "Poor lad!"

"He must have been watching her, following her," the colonel went on. "He forced his way into Sutcliffe's rooms with some idea of saving her, I suppose."

"Go on, go on!" she whispered breathlessly.

At the conclusion of his tale she exclaimed aloud in astonishment: "Your daughter, Crispin! Your daughter!"

"But I've been telling you right along it was my girl."

Nancy turned her head.

"I—I understood it differently," she stammered.

"You knew I had been married," he said.

"Yes, I heard something—years ago. Never any details. I supposed she was dead."

"She is dead."

"I never heard of a child."

"Nothing strange in that," he said. "I had forgotten her myself."

"Forgotten her!" exclaimed Nancy.

"I must tell you the whole story now. Twenty years ago I was still an engineer. It was before I had been drawn into the bigger game. I was sent with a staff to survey certain anthracite prospects along the southern border of New York State. We were lodged in a village called Farrowdale. A storybook village; green-clad hills, and rich farms in the bottoms. But we found it slow in our hours of ease. Out of sheer boredom we went to church. It was in church that I first saw Mary Lore—praying."

He cleared his husky voice and went on:

"I fell in love at sight. We all did. We got introduced through the parson. There was hard feeling among the fellows. I beat them all out. I was the most experienced. And Mary—I carried her off her feet. She had never seen anybody like me."

"What was she like?" whispered Nancy.

"Can't go into details," he muttered.

"You'll have me blubbing presently. My girl is a little like her. Sometimes I forget and think she is Mary. But she has a bolder, a more vivid spirit. Mary was shy, reticent. I called her—Bluebell. Her hair was pale gold—like corn silk. We were married after a fortnight's courtship."

"For a few months we were angelically happy. Then the prospects of anthracite around Farrowdale petered out, and my job there was done. It was then that I received an offer to develop the coal mines belonging to the Crown of Westphalia. It seemed best to leave my tender Mary at home until I

saw what there was in it. So I went abroad alone."

"Months passed. Our baby was born. My job turned out to be the great opportunity of my life, and I could not leave it. And Mary could not travel with a young baby. How can I tell you what was happening in my absence? One of the young engineers on my former staff had returned to Farrowdale, and was making love to my wife. Oh, he was clever! Concealed his hand; laid a regular patient siege; told her lies about me."

"When I got back to America the mischief was done. Never mind the details. It nearly broke my heart. But never for a moment have I blamed Mary. It was her innocent ignorance, her softness of heart that betrayed her. What chance had a simple country girl against an accomplished villain like that?"

"I allowed her to divorce me, and she married him. To do him credit he was madly in love with her. I laid no claim to the baby, because I thought a child's proper place was with her mother. I never even saw the baby. I went back to Europe, and was quickly drawn into great affairs. I never heard of them again."

"What happened was that Mary died within a short time of her second marriage, and her husband disappeared. The baby was left to the care of Agnes Lore, Mary's sister, who carried the child away to a place where her unhappy story was not known, and gave her her mother's family name—Lore. But this I did not know."

"I heard nothing of them until the afternoon of that day that I last saw you here. On my return home I was greeted in my own drawing-room by this charming girl, who said: 'I am Diantha Lore. I think perhaps my right name is Diantha Flowerday.'"

"I leave you to imagine what my feelings were. I am older now. And my heart is softer."

"She was not sure, you see, that she was my daughter. Her aunt, a bitter, proud woman, never told her the facts of her birth. The death of her aunt left her alone in the world, and she had returned to Farrowdale, hoping to find friends or relatives. There she had heard a garbled version of her

mother's story, and she came to me for the truth. At first I concealed the truth from her. I wanted to test her. But she soon showed me she was as clever and good as she was beautiful."

"But, Crispin," said Mrs. Guyon in distress. "Oh, I know it's not for me to ask it, but I *must* ask it! How could you put your own daughter in such a position?"

He pulled his mustache. "I thought that would be self-evident after I told you my story. I've seen a lot of life in the last twenty years, a lot of the seamy side. Not alone my own unhappiness, but yours, too, and scores of other cases have taught me that half the tragedies of life are due to those very qualities that we so carefully cultivate in our girls. I mean their ignorance of evil, their lovely innocence, their tenderness—"

"Ah, that's true!" murmured Mrs. Guyon.

"Well, the minute I laid eyes on that girl of mine, so beautiful, so clear-eyed, so confiding, I swore I would arm her against evil with every weapon I possessed. I took her completely into my confidence. I allowed her to share my life. Took her everywhere. Showed her everything.

"I concealed her relation to me so that she would not be treated with any false respect. It happened that with her cleverness and charm she made an ideal instrument to carry out the business I had in hand. She undertook it with enthusiasm. I need hardly tell you that I took care to protect her from any real danger."

There was a silence in the little room.

Finally Mrs. Guyon asked very low: "Is she—is she in love with my boy?"

The colonel jumped up with a gesture of distress and perplexity.

"I don't know!" he cried. "At first I suspected she was, confound him! But I can get nothing out of her now. She has shut herself up. Turned hard as stone. I don't know what to do!"

Mrs. Guyon thought first of her own child.

"Good Heavens!" she cried. "How he must have suffered this night! And I don't know where he is! First, I must find him. Then I'll know what to do!"

An hour later Colonel Flowerday brought Mrs. Guyon to his own house. Afraid of betraying too much in his face, he dared not himself announce her to Diantha, but sent Gumpel to tell Diantha that a lady wished to see her who had not given any name.

Diantha answered quickly: "I can't see her. I can't see any one."

Gumpel would not take that for an answer.

"Excuse me, miss. If it's not a liberty, I think you ought to see this one."

"Why?"

"She's a lady. When you're sure, you're sure."

Diantha's instincts were alarmed. She feared—she didn't know what, but something that threatened the peace of mind she was struggling to achieve.

"No," she said. "I don't doubt she's what you say, but I can't see strangers. If she wants a subscription or something, let her write to me."

"Might be just a friendly call," suggested Gumpel.

"Why doesn't she send up her name, then?"

"Can't say, miss. If I should be mistaken in her, I'll be right there in the hall to show her out."

"No!" cried Diantha, becoming exasperated. "What makes you so persistent, Gumpel?"

"I don't know, miss," he said slyly. "I have, as they say, a hunch that you ought to see this lady."

At the unexpected answer Diantha's drawn face relaxed. Then she could no longer hold out. "All right," she said. "I'll go down."

In the Henri IV room Diantha found a pretty woman with an exquisite air such as it takes at least three generations to produce. She was agitated, yet she came toward Diantha in a way as direct and frank as Diantha's own.

"So this is what you're like?" she said breathlessly. "They have not overrated you."

Diantha's eye fell under her terrible scrutiny—though there was nothing unkind in it.

"I am Mrs. Guyon," she said.

Her apparent youth had put Diantha off her guard. The girl started, and a painful blush mantled her face.

Nancy thought sadly. "Ah, she *does* love him!"

The mother experienced both jealousy and tenderness.

"Don't try to thank me," said Diantha painfully.

"I'm not going to try," said Nancy simply. "Words wouldn't convey it. If you'll let me be your friend, maybe time will show."

"You are very kind."

"No, it's as Randal's mother that I came."

Again the painful blush.

"I"—Nancy came to a dead stop. She spread out her hands appealingly. "I came—it is difficult, isn't it? Randal has been talking to me about you for weeks. But of course I hadn't seen you then. I didn't know—" She made a fresh start. "He's in love with you," she said simply. "You know that, I expect."

Diantha lowered her head.

"And you're in love with him, I think."

"What makes you say that?" Diantha asked sharply. "Did he tell you?"

"He did not. He doesn't know it, poor dear. But I am a woman like yourself. I have eyes. Why shouldn't you love him? He is very lovable."

"Don't you see how it hurts to have anybody guess it?" murmured Diantha.

This was so like Randal's own cry that Nancy's heart was deeply touched. She lowered her eyes.

"Oh, I know! You may be sure I shan't tell him."

"You are doing this out of gratitude," murmured Diantha painfully. "You will be sorry for it later. There can be nothing between me and—and your son."

Nancy interrupted her sharply. "Gratitude! Do you think I could sacrifice him, however grateful I might be? I'm doing it for his sake. He'll be here directly."

"Coming here!" gasped Diantha.

"I haven't seen him," said Nancy. "I just telephoned Mr. Oddie to bring him. He doesn't know I'm here. You'll see him, won't you?"

"No, no!" said Diantha. "No good could come of it. I can make no explanations."

"No, but I can," said Mrs. Guyon meaningly.

Diantha looked at her in a sort of horror.

"You mustn't!" she cried. "I couldn't let you!"

"He's on the way. I can't stop him now."

"Colonel Flowerday must speak to you," said Diantha agitatedly. "You must not be allowed to do this thing!"

She rang for a servant.

"I'm doing it for Randal," persisted Nancy.

A footman entered.

"Ask Colonel Flowerday if he will please come here," said Diantha.

The man went out.

"It is useless to try to stop me," said Nancy. "My mind is made up—Diantha!"

She held out her arms. Before she well knew what was happening Diantha found herself imprisoned within them.

"Oh, my dear," whispered Nancy, "if you make him happy I shall love you forever! He has a terrible capacity for happiness, my poor lad—or for misery!"

"You frighten me," murmured Diantha. "All I can do is love him!"

"That's all he wants," said Nancy.

The colonel found them in each other's arms. He looked out of the window and pulled his mustache.

The footman reëntered to announce Mr. Guyon. Diantha and Nancy sprang apart, each seeking desperately to remove the traces of tears. Randal came into the room almost on the servant's heels. He looked haggard and reckless. He stopped dead, and looked blankly from one to another of the three persons in the room.

"Mother!" he cried. "What are you doing here?"

"Colonel Flowerday and I are old friends," she said hurriedly.

"Old friends?" he said, dazed. "Why was I never told that?"

For the moment Nancy ignored his question.

"Colonel Flowerday has told me everything that took place last night," she said.

Randal scowled. "Why did you have to be dragged into this?"

"Because I am the person most concerned, dear."

Both the colonel and Diantha made an involuntary imploring gesture for her to stop, but she waved it aside.

"You?" said Randal. "This is all Greek to me."

Nancy had an embroidered black velvet bag hanging from her arm. She fumbled nervously with the strings.

"Diantha got certain letters out of Sutcliffe's safe," she said. "You asked her to show them to you, and she refused. Well, I will show them to you now." She had got the bag open, and was holding out the packet of faded blue letters.

Randal's look had grown more and more amazed. "How did you get hold of them?" he demanded.

"They are my letters. That is to say, I wrote them. Diantha was recovering them for me."

He was staring at the letters as at accursed things. He made no move to touch them.

"Take them," urged Nancy.

He finally took them in a daze, and turned the packet over in his hands.

She kept on unflatteringly: "They were written years ago to a man I loved. He is dead. I am not ashamed of them. I want you to read them."

At last comprehension seemed to break on him. It was her handwriting that he recognized.

"Nancy! Yours!" he cried loudly.

"Good God, what a fool I have been!"

He cast an extraordinary look in Diantha's direction. Her head was turned away.

"Read them!" urged Nancy.

"No!" he cried. "What do you think I am? Do you think I could doubt *you*? What is it to me what letters you have written? Mayn't I destroy them, Nancy?"

"Yes, if you wish," she said, faintly.

He looked around instinctively for some means of destroying them on the spot. There was a wood fire laid in the antique fireplace, but it was not lighted.

"Can I start this going, sir?" Randal asked the colonel.

"By all means! By all means!" said the colonel gruffly. "The room is cold."

Randal dropped to his knees in front of the fireplace and put a match to the tinder. A little flame poked its way up through the interstices of the logs. One by one Randal tore up the letters, and fed them to the fire. The other three persons watched him fascinated, and no one said a word.

When at last he got up he did not turn around right away. A horrible constraint fell upon all four.

It was Nancy who broke the silence. She said nervously to the colonel: "Won't you show me about your new house, Crispin?"

The colonel promptly offered her his arm. Diantha put out a beseeching hand to stay them, but they walked out of the room.

When Randal turned around he stole a glance in Diantha's face. She seemed entirely composed; indeed she had almost a forbidding air.

Diantha looked at him, too, but he never guessed it; girls have that art. There was no confidence in his bearing, he looked frightened out of his wits. That made her feel better, but she was unable to give him any encouragement. She did not speak, because she could not be offhand, and to speak formally would have been absurd. She sat down on a little sofa between the two front windows. He dared not take the seat beside her until Diantha called his attention to it. His humility most sweetly soothed her wounded pride.

"It was good of you to let me come here," he mumbled.

"I am glad to have you," said Diantha.

Exactly like amateurs in a badly rehearsed play.

"Shall we join the others upstairs?" suggested Diantha.

"Not just yet," stammered Randal.

A silence fell between them, a devastating silence. Diantha looked straight ahead of her. She was keenly aware of his imploring, deep, dark eyes, but she could not stir. In the end Nature had its way with him. He put out his trembling hand and touched hers. Instantly her fingers twined warmly around his, and they were drowned in bliss.

IMMORTAL FRAUDS

WOMAN GARBED AS MAN
MASTERED MEDICINE

By CAPTAIN HORATIO WRAGGE

IN the third century before our era there dwelt at Athens a gifted and exquisite girl with an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Her parents were poor and she found it necessary to earn a precarious livelihood by combing the tresses of the wives of successful rhetoricians. In due time she accumulated a competence from the proceeds of which she hoped to be able to pay for instruction in the sciences. Medicine was the specialty to which she was peculiarly attracted. Her name was Agnodice.

The only instructor to whom it occurred to Agnodice to resort was Hierophilus, one of the most brilliant of the physicians of antiquity. His lectures on the science of medicine were thronged daily not only by Athenian youths who longed to become doctors but by individuals from Persia, Syracuse and even the remote peninsula of Sirmio. The students of Hierophilus were renowned as far as the pillars of Hercules for the skill with which they checked fevers, and of the master himself it was affirmed that he could bring the hopeless invalid leaping with joy from a sickbed to the theatre.

Agnodice accordingly enrolled herself among the pupils of Hierophilus, but that renowned healer threw up his hands in horror and amazement at the mere suggestion that a female be permitted to study so severe a science as that of medicine. He assured the weeping Agnodice that he had never heard of such a thing in his life. It seemed to him inconsistent with the delicacy of her sex. He suddenly remembered an ancient law, passed some hundred and fifty years previously, in which the practice of medicine by a woman was denounced as impious.

The entreaties of Agnodice and her reminders that the statute in question was obsolete had no effect upon the master of the art of medicine at Athens. In tears at her rebuff, Agnodice withdrew to the home of the wife of a rhetorician, who listened with indignation to her version of the morning's event.

"If I were you," she said, "I would dress myself in man's clothes and attend the lectures under a man's name."

Agnodice objected that she did not know how to walk like a man or how to compete with the men students of Hierophilus in their rougher sports. Now and then they came to blows at the lectures when they could not agree with their preceptor regarding the value of this or that feature of his therapy. The wife of the rhetorician undertook to school Agnodice in such practices, for she had long been married and often came to blows with her husband. Profiting by such instruction, the eager Agnodice soon learned to deport herself in all respects like a young man and to use the fashionable oaths of the city in a strong voice.

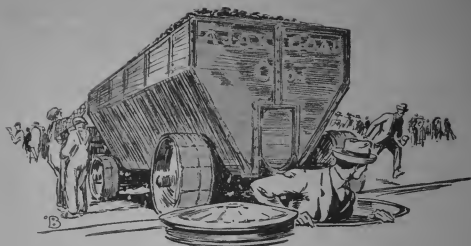
She presented herself in due time at the lectures, having previously inscribed herself under a fictitious name, and speedily absorbed all the knowledge of the master. Hierophilus himself was edified by her progress and as she had given herself out as a Persian in exile because of the civil wars then distracting the realm of the great king, certain inconsistencies of accent and of demeanor were readily accounted for. Agnodice, licensed to heal, set herself up in Athens as a physician, making a specialty of midwifery.

Her skill became obvious from the first and the wife of the rhetorician who had befriended her kept her secret so well that nobody suspected it. Agnodice built up a splendid practice among all classes of society, and in due time she had many of the gilded youth of the city among her patients. Her midwifery, moreover, was so skilled that not one woman attended by Agnodice ever died in childbirth.

The other physicians of the city now began to feel jealous of the young doctor. They were displeased with her popularity among the young women of Athens, who found her ministrations as soothing as they were efficient. The daughter of a great landed proprietor confessed that in gratitude for her delivery from a fever, she had kissed her physician. There was an uproar among the medical faculty at this development and the confused Agnodice found herself on trial in public before the courts on a charge that she was corrupting the morals of her patients. Various young women were driven to confess that they had, in the exuberance of their appreciation, embraced this seductive healer.

The evidence against Agnodice proved overwhelming and her judges, moved though they were by her youth and beauty, found it impossible to bring in any verdict but guilty. Thereupon Agnodice, with many blushes, confessed that she was masquerading in the habiliments of a male. "I am woman!" she cried amid the wildest uproar.

The jealous physicians who had instigated the prosecution now resurrected the ancient law which forbade any member of Agnodice's sex from practicing the profession of medicine. There was every prospect that she would be condemned to death, but the wife of the rhetorician who had suggested the imposture in the beginning now organized a revolt among the women of Athens. The mothers who owed their delivery from the pangs of labor to the skill of Agnodice came forward with tears to entreat that the life of their physician be spared, and amid a tumult of enthusiasm the obnoxious law was abolished.



Vanishing Vardaman

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

HANSON, headquarters detective, dived through the entrance to the department store, catapulting like a bombshell the length of the long aisle, to the scandal and confusion of the mid-afternoon shoppers. Just ahead, in the swirl and eddy of the crowd, a lithe figure wove in and out with the practiced ease of a football player going through a broken field. A moment he showed against the sunlight pouring through the opposite entrance—then he was gone, into the teeming street.

But the plainclothesman was not far behind. Even as his quarry erupted into the thoroughfare the detective's hand, reaching, made a darting thrust—it closed on empty air, however, with a last swerving dodge of the tall figure in the tan overcoat.

Again Vanishing Vardaman had made his get-away, melting into the hurrying throng. His flying coat tails whipped around the corner as Hanson, his hands balling into fists, made after with what speed he might.

It had not been the first time that the notorious "dip" and "strong-arm" had

evaded him, and at the very moment, as it seemed, of victory for the hound of the law. For Vanishing Vardaman had got his name for the same reason that had made him a thorn in the side of the department for a longer time than Hanson, for example, cared to think of. And the man had seemed to take an especial delight in setting the dogs of the police by the ears—with him it might have been a game, and a sporting one had it not been that the stakes were a little heavier than in any mere contest of speed and wit.

But so far Vardaman had pitted his single wits against the resources of the entire police force of a great city—and so far, turning and doubling like a fox, he had won clear.

But this time Hanson swore there would be a different ending. He made after the fugitive now with a dogged determination.

Vardaman never affected any disguises; rather, he seemed to delight in a distinctive dress which, if anything, rendered him more conspicuously noticeable. That tan coat—

Hanson could see it even now—or he thought that he could. And then; abruptly, not ten paces in advance, he saw it again, swaying to the lift and drive of the powerful shoulders, almost within arm's reach; the tan coat and the shapeless soft hat of Vanishing Vardaman.

A leap—and the detective's blunt fingers had closed upon his quarry's wrist in a grip of iron.

"Now—Mr. Vanishing Vardaman—guess we'll take a little walk—" he was beginning when, abruptly, at the face which he beheld, his mouth fell open in amaze. Mumbling an apology, he backed off, his face crimson in his chagrin.

For the face that he had seen was not Vanishing Vardaman's—it was that of a total stranger.

Again his quarry had eluded him. Somewhere now, doubtless, safe in that haven which the department had never been able to discover, the vanishing one sat and gloated.

Hanson, raging, swung off at right angles to his course. He was now in a residential section—the street drowsed in the hot afternoon sun, peaceful, silent, empty. Head down, the plainclothesman went onward, wearily, and with dragging step. He was tired. And it was the way he always felt following his numerous encounters with this fox without wings.

Disgustedly he trudged onward. The sun was burning hot; the asphalt underfoot seemed of the consistency of molten lava; life was, after all, just a mocking, ironic jest at the expense of him, Detective Hanson, and the jester who mocked was that sleek, slim, debonair adventurer known as Vanishing Vardaman!

And then, in a second, in a flash of time the plainclothesman's weariness vanished even as had the figure of the fugitive back there on the crowded avenue. Plunging forward at a pounding run, Hanson, his chagrin forgotten in the sudden, abrupt need for action, went forward at the double-quick.

For there, sauntering idly along the tree-shaded thoroughfare was—Vanishing Vardaman, tan coat, soft hat, gardenia in the buttonhole of the coat—and this time there could be no mistake.

Even as he sprang forward the detective had seen that hawklike countenance, like a falcon, a bird of prey—it was surely he. At last! In a moment now they would have him where he would be secure.

Vardaman had heard nothing, suspected nothing, as it seemed. On the hot asphalt the detective's rubber-soled shoes made no sound. Curiously enough, it had never once occurred to him to pull his gun; perhaps, so strong was his desire to lay hands upon the will-o'-the-wisp, he had never intended using it. Vardaman, perhaps a half block in advance, was swinging along with a loose, easy stride, all unconscious, as it appeared, of the Nemesis at his back. And now, just in front of him a wagon loomed—it was backed sidewise across the walk.

Vardaman passed that wagon; Hanson saw him pass it a matter of seconds before he, too, rounded it. It was a huge motor truck; sidewise, it effectually blocked passage save by the street.

Hanson skirted it in full career; and then—he stopped dead, his expression a curious mixture of amaze, chagrin, and sheer, stolid stupefaction.

For Vardaman had vanished!

The street stretched bare and empty under the declining sun. There was no sign of Vardaman anywhere; he had disappeared as utterly as if he had been snatched up into a Fourth Dimension ready to hand.

The plainclothesman stared, blinking owlishly in the strong sunlight. Then he glanced downward at the coal hole, but the lid was on—it was shut tight. He turned to two grimy men, appearing suddenly around the end of the truck; for a moment Hanson entertained the impossible suspicion that one of them might be the man whom he sought.

But the fugitive, even supposing that he knew that he was being followed, would scarcely have had time to make the lightning shift from debonair pedestrian to black-faced coal heaver.

Hanson shrugged, turning to the men with a brief:

"Seen anything of a tall man—light tan overcoat—flower in his buttonhole—soft hat? He passed by here just a moment ago."

The men stared; then, as with one voice: "We ain't seen nobody, mister," they told him. "We've been here the best part of two hours, and we've put in a couple tons—no, mister, if anybody had passed we'd have seen him, certain sure."

Hanson contrived a grimace that was meant to be a smile. Plainly, what they thought of him had not been expressed in words. He scowled—then, at a dragging walk, went onward along the street. Vanishing Vardaman had once more made good his sobriquet—the fox had won.

II.

ALL was quiet in the great house on the corner, dreaming in the late afternoon sun. And in the dimness belowstairs there was a thick, velvety darkness—dark as soot—musty, one might have said, save for a faint, acrid tang rising out of the depths.

Abruptly the silence of the great cellar was broken by a prodigious sneeze; there came a muffled curse—then the bright beam of a flashlight danced, glimmering, upon floor and wall.

A shapeless figure showed as a dim blot of darker shadow behind the circle of the flash; then, fumbling at the wall switch, that acrid coal dust caught him once again, and once more there came that mighty sneeze, shaking the rafters overhead, as it seemed to the prowler there in the cellar.

Vanishing Vardaman waited a tense moment, hand over his nostrils, but no sound answered him to tell him that he was discovered. In the split second that he had circled that coal truck there, before him, had yawned that open coal hole. And for the split second that he was invisible to Hanson and to the two who labored upon the other side of the truck, he had made his exit, preceding the clamping of that lid by a margin so close that even now he could hear the clanging rattle of its closing just above his head.

At the moment that he had circled the truck he had known that the plainclothesman was behind him, and his decision had been taken almost without conscious thought. But—he was safe. Hanson had gone on—of that he was now convinced.

But that light switch had not answered to the pressure of his finger—that might have told him something, clever as he was, but he was thinking merely that it was fortunate that his flashlight had not been broken in his somewhat unconventionally hasty ingress.

He had waited a moment, listening with all his ears. Then he had heard the purring of the motor; the coal shovelers were going. They had clamped on that lid—on him, Vanishing Vardaman—that was a noble jest, indeed! For the prison was not made that would hold him, because—they would never get him into it!

The family were probably upstairs at dinner. It would be an easy matter for Vardaman to make his get-away, if he so desired, but the house was a large one; there were, in all probability, excellent pickings to be had abovestairs; he would collect his tribute on the way out, and no one ever the wiser.

But as he went forward now into the velvet black, he was recalling that hectic moment as he had rounded the motor truck. For a breathless half second it had been touch and go—and he had stood not upon the order of his going.

The house was a large one; that much he had noticed, casually, as he had come round the corner—but there was a something else: there had been a something about that house that he had sensed rather than seen—but at the moment he was unable to recall it; if he had but known it it was connected with the failure of that light switch. But this faded presently with his discovery of something else.

For a little time now he had been aware of a silence—it pounded in his ears with the tension of his hard-held breath, as slowly, carefully, his flashlight held gingerly before him, he began to mount a long stairway that seemed to run upward interminably into an even deeper gloom.

Characteristically he walked on that side of the stair nearest the wall as a precaution against possible disclosure; but it was a wasted precaution, if he had but known it. Those stairs were solid, like iron; they gave forth no sound to the pressure of his careful footfall. And even if they had, the sound

would scarcely have been heard, even in that singing silence.

The flash steadied, centered upon a door; it gave outward silently to his slow, stealthy pressure, as, like a great cat, he stepped through the opening, to find himself in a sort of closet.

Carefully he opened another door, the flashlight's beam falling upon bright copper and shiny nickel; he was in the kitchen.

But the room was dark and silent. Listening with all his ears he heard merely the sound of his own breathing, loud in the stillness—then, after a moment, came the clang and rattle of a motor from the street without, as through many thicknesses of walls.

But if that silence was odd the darkness was out of place. The sun yet lacked a half hour of its setting, and yet that kitchen was dark, almost with a midnight darkness. And the silence held.

Vardaman, abating somewhat his caution, passed with his swift, silent step into a room, lofty-ceilinged—the dining room—but there was no one there.

Vardaman grinned in the darkness with a silent chuckle. This was indeed better than he had hoped. For the house was empty—tenantless, rather; the failure of the light switch might have told him that. Well, there was plenty of time for his inspection. And he would leave nothing of value that he could take away with him. Soon it would be night, and to leave that house unseen would be an easy matter—for Vanishing Vardaman.

The house was an old-fashioned one on an old-fashioned street. He doubted that it had been wired for burglary, but moving with an inbred caution, he found the wire after a little, ripped it out with a twist of his powerful pincers, the while humming a little tune.

Why, it would be too easy. Mounting the stairs to the second floor, he found that which he sought: an old-fashioned escritoire—just the sort of thing one would expect to come upon in an old-fashioned house, tenanted by old-fashioned folk who had an inbred dislike for such new-fangled inventions as safe-deposit boxes.

And there were jewels in it—not many—

but the intruder's eyes bulged as he swept them up and into his pocket. He need go no further. Literally, Vanishing Vardaman had fallen down a coat hole and come up wearing diamonds!

Still humming that wordless melody, he passed down the stair, and outward to the front door.

It was night now, and he might as well be going. And then, after some little difficulty, unlocking and swinging wide the heavy double doors, he recoiled, stepping backward with a startled oath.

For that front door was boarded up!

Vardaman knew that it would be useless and worse than useless to attempt an exit through that heavy oaken barrier, locked, as he knew well, with a patent lock, and from the outside. The cellar was below the level of the street, the windows mere oubliettes—there was no exit that way. But the windows on the ground floor—that should be easy.

He tried the first, and it ran up smoothly enough under his hand, and then—he saw that it, too, was sealed likewise with oak—a barrier which, do what he would, he would not pass.

An ax, yes, if he could find one, would take him through it, but the battering crash of it against the heavy wood—the risk would be too great. Now, for the first time in his chancy life, Vardaman knew panic, or something that approached it, as, mounting the stair again, here, too, he found his way barred by boarded windows, like blind eyes fronting him at every turn.

The house stood alone, its nearest neighbor a good twenty feet away. And there was not even a gutter pipe down which he might have coasted to safety, even had he cared to risk it. For, of an ice-cold nerve and of a courage second to none, Vanishing Vardaman could not abide the heights. Shaking now, he drew backward from the black well of the dark along that rooftop, whither he had come, mounting the skylight ladder in a final, desperate questing for the egress that was denied him.

Like a fly in a bottle, a rat in a trap, Vanishing Vardaman was at last a prisoner. And—he had, literally, put his head into the noose.

That coal hole had been a man trap, but he had never known it.

With shaking fingers he thumbed in his pockets for his cigarettes, but he could not find his case—the elaborate gold-mounted affair that he had lifted, by the supermagic of his facile fingers, under the very nose of an unsuspecting clerk in a smart shop on the avenue.

Somewhere he had lost it, he could not remember where, and now even the solace of a smoke was denied him.

Presently he fell to pacing back and forth on the great rug by the door. The cellar was hopeless; there was not a window in the house but might have been sheet steel for all he could have won to freedom through them.

And the loot in his pocket—it might have sufficed for a king's ransom, but it would not serve to take him an inch beyond his prison house.

And he had been unable to find a single implement that would have served his purpose without noise sufficient to bring down about his ears the minions of the law.

Now, as a caged tiger paces up and down, Vardaman walked up and down that rug, his brain, like a squirrel in a treadmill, going round and round and coming back again and again to that single, hopeless answer: he was trapped.

Abruptly something seemed to snap in his mind with a sort of singing crash. Hurling himself upon the door, he beat upon it with his fists in a futile protest against

fate. Then, backing the length of the long rug, he hurled himself forward, shoulder-high, against the steadfast barrier.

There came a sudden snap—the wooden leaves swung outward, hurling him forward upon his hands and knees. He knew it then: some one had unlocked the door—some one was waiting for him! In the light of the sputtering corner arc he looked, then looked again; heard as from dim leagues of distance, the voice, filled with a biting sarcasm:

"Well, well, Mr. Vanishing Vardaman—welcome to our city!"

The hand holding the gun was thrust almost in his face; in the other something that glinted dully under the light: his cigarette case. As in a daze he listened now to the words of Hanson:

"Well, that was pretty smooth, Vardaman—as a vanishing act it was pretty fair, even for you—you just dropped in, ha! And—my, my! You sure look pretty—dirty, I'll say so! But you left this behind you—very careless of you! And you didn't notice that the house was boarded up, of course, but I had my suspicions, and at that I mightn't have remembered which house it was if it hadn't been for—the evidence. But I think we'd have salted you without it, at that."

The detective's tone became crisp, authoritative.

"Now, Vardaman, you'll do your last vanishing act, and that 'll be—up the river!"

GARDEN GUESSES

SHOULD the daffodilly dally with the lily of the valley,

Would the crocus just as loudly as he could?

Would they rouse narcissuspicious by their reckless exhibitions

Till the primrose up in anger, as he should?

If the violet them do it, would the pair still later rue it?

Would their passion flower in one ecstatic kiss?

Would a bleeding heart be dripping while a lover false was skipping,

Or would bridal wreath be sure to seal their bliss?

J. Lilian Vandevere.



IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

THE SPORT OF KINGS

JUST about the time that his confidant is busiest grinding out the latest in the sport line for his newspaper, Izzy Kaplan is distressingly likely to stroll in and halt the galloping typewriter of W. O. McGeehan to impart some information the writer could get along without.

Consequently, it was with a combination of uneasiness and relief that McGeehan realized that the paper had come off the thundering presses without a single interruption from Izzy. In fact, Izzy had not so much as stuck his nose in the sporting department.

Just as the silent partner was heading homeward, however, a bent, drooping figure with dusty trouser legs appeared. It was Izzy!—but not the Izzy that McGeehan knew. For instead of pouring out floods of dope, the pathetic figure appealed only for a dollar to buy some foot powder, corn plasters, and transportation to the Bronx. It developed that Izzy had been to the race track and had walked back, convinced that racing was the sport of kings, but not of Kaplans.—
THE EDITOR.



I CHUST found out how it is that so many kinks have lost it their chobs over in Europe on account I have been investigating the sport of kinks, which it is race horsing. I went down to one of the racing tracks with a newspaper feller named Yaphank Benneh, which he is selling newspapers on Park Row and is in business for himseluf, making a nice living. He ain't like one of those fellers who is writing pieces for the papers on a celery. He is a business man.

Yaphank Benneh explanationed for me to stick by him and I would be wearing diamonds on account he never invested no money in a racing horse unless he had it the positive information and he got it his information right out from the feed box. "Izzy," he told me, "look out for toots when you are down at the racing tracks, on account they would try to give you a lot of bum steers."

It is a new kind of lankwitch for me on account I could only speak English, Russian and a little Yiddish. So I esked Yaphank Benneh what it was a toot.

"A toot is a feller which he would tell you to bet your money on a horse which he ain't got a chance," said Benneh. "I hope you would stick close by me, Izzy and not let any of them fellers toot you off like they done a friend of mine who wouldn't listen to me, and I gave him a hundred-to-one shoot and it came in all right, but he listened to the toot and he didn't have nothing down on it at all."

Then I esked him to explanation to me what it was a hundred-to-one shoot and if a feller should carry a gun to the treck with him. Benneh explanationed that when you was investing on a hundred-and-one shot if you put ten dollars in a envelope the feller which he is writing the books for the racing trecks would give you your ten dollars beck and a thousand dollars more besides.

Of course that got me interested right away, on account it looked like a fine investment for a feller to make and I am always looking for a good investment. So I told Benneh that when



SHE SHOULD HAVE HER MIND ON THE RACE.

they were shooting any horse for a hundred to one he should tell me about it quick on account I could make the investment before some other feller got in ahead of me.

Benneh is very well acquainted about the treck, so he went around whispering with a lot of fellers. Everybody is whispering and nobody would talk out loud on account maybe it would wake up the horses. Pretty soon Benneh came to me and told it to me that a horse by the name Annie Rooney would be a cinch in the second race on account he was talking to a personal friend from the horse, or maybe it was the feller who owns the horse.

"Izzy," he told me, "that horse is going to walk in."

Right away quick I told him beck: "Then I wouldn't invest my money on it, on account I don't want no horse that would walk. I want a horse which she should have her mind on the race and keep running, even when winning, on account you couldn't win by too much. If you wouldn't win it don't metter how little you lose by."

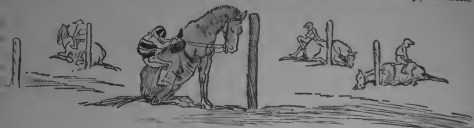
Then I told Yaphank Benneh he should take ten dollars to the feller which he is collectioning the investments. The feller gives him a ticket, which it reads Annie Rooney is only twenty to one. I made a holler on account I wanted she should be a hundred to one, but Yaphank Benneh told me that if a new beginner started in winning a thousand dollars the first time he made it an investment the fellers which is writing the books might get scared off and go into benkrupstsy and it would be bad for the game, which it was a fine game and the sport of the kinks.

So, anyhow, I told him that two hundred dollars for ten was not so bad, and I esked him how long it was going on on account if people would hear it was so easy you wouldn't be able to keep the customers out.

Pretty soon there is a parade from the horses, and a feller is blowing a horn, and

everybody is stending up and looking at them. I am hoping that everybody doesn't know that Annie Rooney is going to win, on account somebody might do her something and spoil the race. The feller which is riding Annie Rooney is a black feller with a red and green shirt, which would cost you about tweluf dollars even you got it wholesale in Grand Street.

Somebody said: "They're off," and the horses started to move away, all excepting one of them. I was looking at them to see where it was Annie Rooney, but none



THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE NO MORE POSTS.

of the fellers was wearing red and green. Then I looked back, and Annie Rooney ain't started yet. I am thinking maybe that she didn't hear the signals on account maybe she had trouble with her ears and that they would tell the other fellers to come beck so that Annie Rooney would get another chance to commence starting.

But the horses kept moving along, and everybody is hollering and nobody is paying no attention to Annie Rooney. When she commences to start she is moving very slow, like she ain't got no interest in the race at all, and I didn't think the feller which he was riding her knew that I had my ten dollars invested. Maybe Yaphank Benneh forgot to mention it to him.

I don't know what it is the name of the horse which it wins the race, but his number is Number Ten. Nobody could pronounce the names which they are naming those horses with, anyhow. The names is stranger than the names they got for Mr. Pullmanstein's sleeping cars which has got the upstairs and downstairs apartments about the same size as the apartments which they are renting them in the Bronx for fifty dollars a month, and you got to sign it a lease that you will sleep in them for two years.

When the other horses came in I esked Yaphank Benneh: "What is the metter, did something delay Annie Rooney in the race?"

"She was left at the post," Benneh says. "Otherwise she would walk in."

"Ain't there a lot of carelessness around the racing track," I esked him, "that they should leave a horse by the post when a feller has his money invested? What kind of a business is it where they would forget to take a horse away from the post when it is important?"

"Izzy," Benneh told me, "it happens some time to the best of them."

Right away I got it a fine ideer. But I didn't told it to Yaphank Benneh on account ideers is worth money if you would take them to the right people, and I am taking this ideer to the feller which owns it the racing track. The ideer is this: They shouldn't have no more posts, and then the horses wouldn't be left by them.

I told Benneh that I wouldn't invest no more money unless he would get the feller which was riding the horse to tie a string around his finger so that he wouldn't forget and leave his horse by the post. Then Benneh got sore and told me I was a piker and that I never appreciated all the good things he was getting for me, and I told him right beck that Chon D. Rockerstein himseluf didn't have enough benk roll to stand the good things which Benneh was getting, and also I said his information was bum even he did get it from the feed box. So one word led to another till finally he poked me in the eye so that I am suing him for demeges, also to get beck the investment which he was swindling me out from.

It is my opinion Yaphank Benneh is a toot and was tooting me all the time.

Next week Izzy Kaplan will comment upon THE PRICE OF A PASS.

Can You Guess This Man's Age?

See if You Can Tell Within 25 Years;
The Author Couldn't; But He Stuck
With Hobart Bradstreet Until He Re-
vealed His Method of Staying Young

By WILLIAM R. DURGIN

I USED to pride myself on guessing people's ages. That was before I met Hobart Bradstreet, whose age I missed by a quarter-century. But before I tell you how old he really is, let me say this:

My meeting-up with Bradstreet I count the luckiest day of my life. For while we often hear how our minds and bodies are about 50% efficient—and at times feel it to be the truth—he knows why. Furthermore, he knows how to overcome it—in five minutes—and he showed me how.

This man offers no such bromides as setting-up exercises, deep-breathing, or any of those things you know at the outset you'll never do. He uses a principle that is the foundation of all chiropractic, naprapathy, mechano-therapy, and even osteopathy. Only he does not touch a hand to you; it isn't necessary.

The reader will grant Bradstreet's method of staying young worth knowing and using, when told that its originator (whose photograph reproduced here was taken a month ago) is sixty-five years old!

And here is the secret: *he keeps his spine a half-inch longer than it ordinarily would measure.*

Any man or woman who thinks just one-half inch elongation of the spinal column doesn't make a difference should try it! It is easy enough. I'll tell you how. First, though, you may be curious to learn why a full-length spine puts one in an entirely new class physically. The spinal column is a series of tiny bones, between which are pads or cushions of cartilage. Nothing in the ordinary activities of us humans stretches the spine. So it "settles" day by day, until those once soft and resilient pads become thin as a safety-razor blade—and just about as hard. One's spine (the most wonderfully designed shock-absorber known) is then an unyielding column that transmits every shock straight to the base of the brain.

Do you wonder folks have backaches and headaches? That one's nerves pound toward the end of a hard day? Or that a nervous system may periodically go to pieces? For every nerve in one's body connects with the spine, which is a sort of central switchboard. When the "insulation," or cartilage, wears-down and flattens-out, the nerves are exposed, or even impinged—and there is trouble on the line.

Now, for proof that subluxation of the spine causes most of the ills and ailments which spell "age" in men or women. Flex your spine—"shake it out!"—and they will disappear. You'll feel the difference in ten minutes. At least, I did. It's no trick to secure complete spinal laxation as Bradstreet does it. But like everything else, one must know how. No amount of violent exercise will do it; not even chopping wood. As for walking, or golfing, your spine settles down a bit firmer with each step.

Mr. Bradstreet has evolved from his 25-year experience with spinal mechanics a simple, boiled-down formula of just five movements. Neither takes more than one minute, so it means but five minutes a day. But those movements! I never experienced such compound exhilaration before. I was a good subject for the end of the first movement I went into it with a bad headache. At the end of the second movement I thought I could actually feel my blood circulating. The third movement in this remarkable Spine-Motion series brought an amazing feeling of exhilaration. One motion seemed to open and shut my backbone like a jack-knife.

I asked about constipation. He gave me another motion—a peculiar, writhing and twisting movement—and fifteen minutes later came a complete evacuation!

Hobart Bradstreet frankly gives the full credit for his conspicuous success to these simple secrets of Spine-Motion. He has traveled abroad for years, conditioning those whose means permitted a specialist at their beck and call. I met him at the Rectorcroft Inn, at East Aurora. Incidentally, the late Elbert Hubbard and he were great pals; he was often the "Fra's"



HOBART BRADSTREET, THE MAN WHO DECLINES TO GROW OLD

guest in times past. But Bradstreet, young as he looks and feels, thinks he has chased around the country long enough. He has been prevailed upon to put his Spine-Motion method in form that makes it now generally available.

I know what these remarkable mechanics of the spine have done for me. I have checked up at least twenty-five other cases. With all sincerity I say nothing in the whole realm of medicine or specialism can quicker re-make, rejuvenate and restore one. I wish you could see Bradstreet himself. He is arrogantly healthy; he doesn't seem to have any nerves. Yet he puffs incessantly at a black cigar that would flog some men, drinks two cups of coffee at every meal, and I don't believe he averages seven hours sleep. It shows what a sound nerve-mechanism will do. He says a man's power can and should be unabated up to the age of 60, in every sense, and I have had some astonishing testimony on that score.

Would you like to try this remarkable method of "looming back"? Or, if young, and apparently normal in your action and feelings, do you want to see your energies just about doubled? It is easy. No "apparatus" is required. Just Bradstreet's few, simple instructions, made doubly clear by his photographic poses of the five positions. Results come amazingly quick. In less than a week you'll have new health, new appetite, new desire, and new capacities; you'll feel years lifted off mind and body. This miracle-man's method can be tested without risk. If you feel enormously benefited, everything is yours to keep and you have paid for it all the enormous sum of \$3.00! Knowing something of the fees this man has been accustomed to receiving, I hope his naming \$3.00 in the general public will have full appreciation.

The \$3.00 which pays for everything is not sent in advance unless you prefer. Just pay the postman who brings it. Requests will be answered in turn. Try how it feels to have a full-length spine, and you'll be comforted pity men and women whose nerves are in a vise!

HOBART BRADSTREET, Suite 414,
630 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

I will try your Spine-Motion without risk if you will provide necessary instruction. I will pay postman just \$3.00 for everything, on arrival. This deposit to be returned in full if I send back the material in 5 days.

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State of New York } s.s.:
County of New York

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WM. T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publishers of THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication, for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24th, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publishers—THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—MATTHEW WHITE, JR., 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—ROBERT H. DAVIS, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—WM. T. DEWART, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

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That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:

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WM. T. DEWART, Business Manager.

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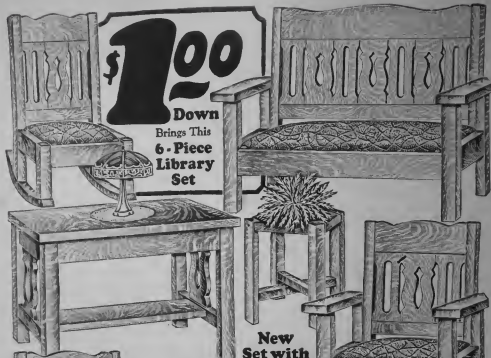
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most Friesians serving in the war had been in the army, and so the army was the main source of recruits. The army was the main source of recruits, and the army was the main source of recruits.

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There are numerous work-related stressors in the modern workplace. There is more work, longer hours and less time for family and friends. Stress is a common experience for many people. It can be a negative experience, but it can also be a positive one. Stress can be a motivator, pushing you to achieve more. It can be a challenge, pushing you to grow and learn. It can be a source of energy, pushing you to push through difficult times. Stress can be a double-edged sword, but it can also be a powerful tool. It can be a source of strength, pushing you to overcome adversity. It can be a source of resilience, pushing you to bounce back from setbacks. It can be a source of courage, pushing you to face your fears. Stress can be a source of hope, pushing you to believe in a better future. Stress can be a source of love, pushing you to care for others. Stress can be a source of life, pushing you to live fully and passionately. Stress can be a source of joy, pushing you to find happiness in the simplest of things. Stress can be a source of peace, pushing you to find calm in the midst of chaos. Stress can be a source of wisdom, pushing you to learn from your experiences. Stress can be a source of power, pushing you to take control of your life. Stress can be a source of freedom, pushing you to break free from the constraints of the world. Stress can be a source of love, pushing you to care for others. Stress can be a source of life, pushing you to live fully and passionately. Stress can be a source of joy, pushing you to find happiness in the simplest of things. Stress can be a source of peace, pushing you to find calm in the midst of chaos. Stress can be a source of wisdom, pushing you to learn from your experiences. Stress can be a source of power, pushing you to take control of your life. Stress can be a source of freedom, pushing you to break free from the constraints of the world.

NEW YORK—The Justice Dept. has proposed revised rules for the treatment of prisoners.

Firms nevertheless must decide
the best course, considering their own
level of investment in the firm.

Major J. Andrew Green, Jr.
and Army Department and Staff
Colonel.

Free Trial Offer

[illegible]

The need to protect other people's eyes has led to the use of the word "eye" in a variety of contexts. The solution is to use all these different words in a variety of ways.



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"There is almost 100 per cent confidence that the system will be successful," says the company's president, John J. O'Connell. "We have a lot of experience in this area, and we are confident that we can deliver a system that will meet the needs of our customers."

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